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# THESIS

**GREAT POWERS, WEAK STATES AND ASYMMETRIC STRATEGIES**

by

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December, 1997

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On the verge of the twenty-first century, America finds itself in the position of a great power with dominant military technology. This thesis examines the possibility that weaker states may be able to strategically innovate and defeat us in war despite our technological advantages. The purpose of the thesis is to survey what type of strategic innovations, also known as asymmetric strategies, are possible and to examine the conditions under which they may be successful. This thesis begins by defining asymmetric strategies using a comprehensive model of strategy developed by Rear Admiral J.C. Wylie. The thesis also examines four variables which may explain the success or failure of asymmetric strategies. To illustrate possible asymmetric strategies and examine the contextual conditions under which they work, the thesis considers the cases of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-36, the Russo-Finnish War of 1939-40, and the American-North Vietnamese War of 1965-73. The thesis finds that the four variables have significant explanatory power for the success or failure of these strategies. The thesis concludes by examining strategic implications for the United States, both as a possible opponent of weak states and as a supporter of a weak state faced by a great power threat.

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# GREAT POWERS, WEAK STATES AND ASYMMETRIC STRATEGIES

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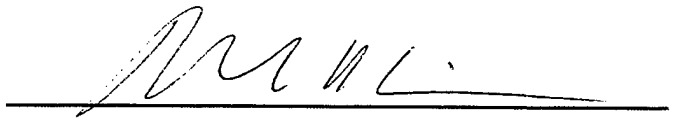
Author: 

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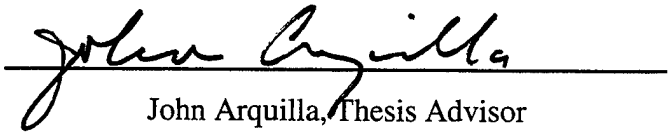
Approved by: 

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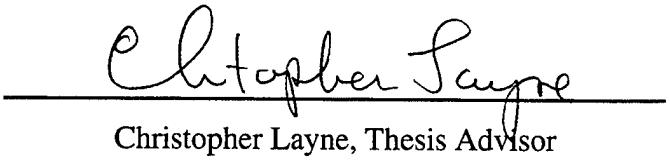

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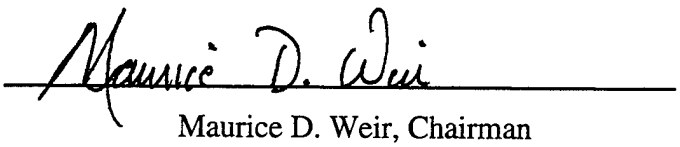

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## ABSTRACT

On the verge of the twenty-first century, America finds itself in the position of a great power with dominant military technology. This thesis examines the possibility that weaker states may be able to strategically innovate and defeat us in war despite our technological advantages. The purpose of the thesis is to survey what type of strategic innovations, also known as asymmetric strategies, are possible and to examine the conditions under which they may be successful.

This thesis begins by defining asymmetric strategies using a comprehensive model of strategy developed by Rear Admiral J.C. Wylie. The thesis also examines four variables which may explain the success or failure of asymmetric strategies. To illustrate possible asymmetric strategies and examine the contextual conditions under which they work, the thesis considers the cases of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-36, the Russo-Finnish War of 1939-40, and the American-North Vietnamese War of 1965-73. The thesis finds that the four variables have significant explanatory power for the success or failure of these strategies. The thesis concludes by examining strategic implications for the United States, both as a possible opponent of weak states and as a supporter of a weak state faced by a great power threat.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

America will enter the next century with an unmatched technological advantage. But will this ensure victory in all military confrontations? Recently, military leaders have argued that we may face "asymmetric threats" in the future.[1] Other military writers have penned fictional accounts of enemies using possible asymmetric strategies to defeat the United States.[2] The general argument that links them all is that, despite America's technological advantages, our enemies could adopt innovative asymmetric tactics or strategies to negate our strengths. Despite this concern about possible strategic innovation in war, the concept remains largely undefined. The purpose of this thesis is to define asymmetric military strategy and to examine the conditions under which it might be successful.

The concept of asymmetry has recently been applied in a number of different contexts. First, a non-traditional, non-military adversary (or network of adversaries) such as terrorists, narco-trafficers, or transnational criminals can be considered an asymmetric threat.[3] Second, conflicts may involve asymmetric stakes; in other words, one side may

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[1] For example, see General Charles Krulak, Commandant, USMC, "A Matter of Strategic Focus," *Airpower Journal* (Spring 1997): 62. An overview of possible tactical responses to U.S. technological dominance is found in Capt. James Stavridis, USN, "The Second Revolution," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no.15 (Spring 1997): 8-13.

[2] Examples include Col. Charles Dunlap, USAF, "How We Lost the High-Tech War of 2007," *The Weekly Standard*, 29 Jan 1996; various books and articles by Maj. Ralph Peters, USA, such as the *War in 2020* (New York: Pocket Books, 1991) and "The Perspective from 2021," *Strategic Review* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 51-59; and the author's own "General Tzu's Army: OPFOR for the Future," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no.15 (Spring 1997): 44-49. Future wars with lesser asymmetric characteristics appear in a books by Col. Trevor Dupuy, USA (ret.), *Future Wars* (New York: Warner Books, 1993); and former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger with Peter Schweizer, *The Next War* (Washington: Regnery, 1996). Popular fiction writers like Tom Clancy have also created readable, if not always plausible, future scenarios.

[3] Referred to as asymmetric in Col. James M. Dubik, USA, "The New Logic," *Armed Forces Journal International*, January 1997, 43. For an overview on these type of threats see Hans Binnendijk and Patrick Clawson, eds. *Strategic Assessment 1997* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1997), 241.

have more to lose than the other.[4] This is a usual feature of great power-weak state conflicts where national survival is a concern for only one side. Third, asymmetry may exist between the weapons technology used by two opponents.[5] Fourth, a single nation-state or groups of states may attempt to mix conventional and unconventional approaches to craft an asymmetric strategy to defeat us in war.[6] This final use of asymmetry will be the focus of this thesis, although the three other uses of the word will be considered in their relationship to the fourth.

In considering the topic of asymmetric strategies in war, I will approach the topic from the perspective of a military strategist. By that I mean to consider the questions of "What is an asymmetric strategy?", "What is required to make it work?" and "How much of a danger does it pose?" These questions present a different focus from that of the political scientist who primarily, but not exclusively, considers "Which states are most likely to use asymmetric strategies and why?" The military strategist should also be interested in these questions; luckily, they have already been well addressed in academic circles.[7]

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[4] One example of this usage of asymmetry is David Ochmanek, "Time to Restructure U.S. Defense Forces," *Issues in Science and Technology*, Winter 1996-97, 36.

[5] Robert O'Connell first used the term weapons asymmetry in his book *Of Arms and Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989),7-8. O'Connell saw that nations and militaries could choose a symmetrical or an asymmetrical response to an opponent's armaments. A symmetrical response would be the development or acquisition of a system similar to the opponents(e.g. a Corsair fighter versus a Zero). An counter response would be the use of a dissimilar system, therefore resulting in an asymmetric situation(e.g. SAMs versus bombers).

[6] Maj. Gen. Robert Scales, USA, sketched out such an asymmetric approach in an interview with the Army News Service. He sees the possibility of "A major competitor...a state or group of states who, in the future, might seek to come at us asymmetrically, to limit our advantage in technology by buying cheap precision and counter-precision [weaponry] of his own, and then to apply his own strengths. His strengths are: [an] ability to build an efficient mass army, to build consensus [through] the collective popular will...and his ability to capitalize on the inherent power of the defensive." See Army Link News at the Army's web site, "Avoiding attrition warfare in 2020-2025," 28 July 1997.

[7] Among the sources which cover this topic are: John Arquilla, *Dubious Battles* (Washington, D.C.: Crane Russak, 1992); Robert Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); esp. 59-66; and Michael Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (London: Frank Cass, 1981), esp. 76-104.

In this inquiry, I make two major assumptions about the conditions under which the U.S. will fight for the next decade, and possibly longer. First, such wars will be great power-small power conflicts. Most defense analysts agree that there is now a "strategic lull," a period where the U.S. lacks a peer competitor.[8] Furthermore, most estimates give the U.S. at least ten years before a peer competitor arrives.[9]

Second, the U.S. will go into conflict with an asymmetric technological capability. As Richard Betts and others have noted, "It appears that for at least quite some time no other country will be able to catch up to the United States in this process of adapting technology, force structure, and doctrine. Therefore, no other country is likely to be able to match American combat power pound for pound."[10] Because of the inability of our future opponents to duplicate America's space and computer-based military advantage, the period of the next one-to-two decades, and possibly longer, will be one of weapons asymmetry.

But will this technological advantage ensure victory in war? Military analysts, both in government and academia, are now arguing that America's technological advantage will ensure our military dominance in the future. Joseph S. Nye, Jr. and Admiral William A. Owens claim that in the "foreseeable future" America will be "more powerful than any other."[11] George and Meredith Friedman extend our dominance further, claiming "the twenty-first century will be the American century."[12]

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[8] *Strategic Assessment 1997*, 241-242. See also, Russell Travers, "A New Millennium and Strategic Breathing Space," *Washington Quarterly* 20, no.2 (Spring 1997): 107.

[9] The American intelligence community has concluded that no conventional military peer could appear before 2010. As reported in "Who's the Enemy?," *U.S. News and World Report*, 12 May 1997, 34.

[10] Richard K. Betts, "Power, Prospects, and Priorities," *Naval War College Review* 50, no.1 (Winter 1997): 20.

[11] Joseph Nye and William Owens, "America's Information Edge," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 2 (March/ April 1996), 20.

[12] George and Meredith Friedman, *The Future of War* (New York: Crown, 1996), 1.

Such technological optimism is not new. Prior to today's information-driven Revolution in Military Affairs, advocates of air power and nuclear weapons predicted great changes in warfare with American dominance as a result.[13] John Arquilla in his book, *Dubious Battles: Aggression, Defeat, and the International System*, identifies similar strands of thought in earlier military thinkers, historians, and political philosophers.[14] But history has largely proven these techno-optimists wrong.

The technologically superior side has not always won battles and wars. A technologically primitive Zulu force annihilated a rifle-armed British force at Isandhlwana. A force of mountain men in Afghanistan defeated the mechanized and air-dominant armed forces of the Soviet Union. Subjecting history to quantitative analysis, John Arquilla finds that the theory of victory through technology provides a very poor explanation of actual results in war.[15]

Instead of placing all our faith in our technological superiority, we should consider the possible responses our opponents could make given the context of the conflict. As Michael Handel has observed, "In the age of advanced technology, there is a natural proclivity to overestimate the role of weapons in war and, as a result, to undervalue the non-tangible dimensions of strategy and war."[16] But there is much to gain by moving beyond the technological tangibles into the world of strategy. By considering possible enemy strategies, we increase our knowledge and begin to approach the ideal of Sun Tzu:

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[13] On air power, see David MacIssac, "Voices from the Central Blue: The Air Power Theorists," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. by Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 624-647. For a more recent perspective on air power, see Richard Hallion, *Storm over Iraq* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian, 1992), esp. 264. On nuclear weapons, see Lawrence Freedman, "The First Two Generations of Nuclear Strategists," also in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 738-741.

[14] Arquilla, 85. See also Alex Roland, "Technology and War: The Historiographical Revolution of the 1980s," *Technology and Culture* 34, no.1 (January 1993): 117-134.

[15] Arquilla, 86.

[16] Michael Handel, *Masters of War* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 19.

knowing both ourselves and the enemy.[17] Armed with this knowledge, we can better estimate the danger of enemy actions and preempt their strategies, the "highest realization of warfare" in the words of the ancient Chinese strategist.[18]

[17] Sun Tzu and Sun Pin, *The Complete Art of War*, trans. by Ralph Sawyer (Boulder: Westview, 1996), 52.

[18] Ibid., 50.

# II. A MODEL OF STRATEGY

## A. DEFINITIONS AND THE MODEL

> Everyone who writes on the subject of strategy finds it necessary to define his understanding of the meaning of the word. As a result there are as many definitions as there are writers. Admiral Castex, for example, quotes nineteen different definitions and then makes up one of his own.
> Colonel Ned B. Rehkopf, United States Army, 1939[1]

The logical starting point for defining asymmetric strategy is the definition of strategy itself. After achieving that, we will progress to a definition of military strategy. Only after laying this foundation can we find a solid definition of asymmetric strategy.

Strategy as a general concept is applied to more than national security, the military, and war. We talk of "strategic investors" and "strategies to achieve happiness in life."[2] In its general form, a Navy strategist, Rear Admiral J.C. Wylie, defined strategy as "a plan of action designed in order to achieve some end; a purpose together with a system of measures for its accomplishment."[3] General Maxwell D. Taylor and Colonel Arthur F. Lykke Jr. provided a comparable general definition of strategy: strategy is the combination of ways (courses of action) to use means (resources) to achieve ends (objectives).[4] This general definition of strategy will be used throughout this thesis.

Strategy in the military sense occurs at four levels.[5] Grand strategy is about the question of which wars to enter or initiate, and how to manipulate all the sources of

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[1] As cited in Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), xv.

[2] One prominent example of the other-than-military use of strategy is Avinash Dixit and Barry Nalebuff, *Thinking Strategically: The Competitive Edge in Business, Politics, and Everyday Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

[3] *Military Strategy*, Classics of Sea Power, eds. John Hattendorf and Wayne Hughes (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1967, reprinted with a new introduction and postscript, 1989), 14.

[4] Arthur F. Lykke, "Defining Military Strategy," *Military Review* 69, no.5 (May 1989): 3.

[5] Since Clausewitz's time, the complexity of armed conflict has expanded the conception of strategy from the old distinction between strategy and tactics into a four-level system. See David Jablonsky, *Why is Strategy Difficult?*, Professional Readings in Military Strategy, No. 4 (U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute, 1992). This is the most common modern conceptualization of

national power in peace and war to one's own advantage.[6] At the opposite end of the spectrum, tactics, a form of strategy in the general sense, is about how to win battles.[7] Above tactics, but below military strategy, is a more recent construct known as "operational art." The focus of this thesis will be at the third level from the bottom, military strategy, the combination of ways, means, and ends, specifically in the context of war(see Figure 1).


Figure 1. The Levels of Strategy

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff define military strategy as "the art and science of employing armed forces of a nation to secure the objectives of national policy by the application of force or the threat of force."[8] By this definition, it is clear that military strategy can be applied during peacetime, although strategies for doing so are outside the realm of this thesis. In the context of war, military strategy can be viewed narrowly as

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strategy, although Edward Luttwak adds a fifth layer, the technical level. See Edward Luttwak, *Strategy* (Cambridge: Belknap Harvard, 1987), chap. 5, 73-81.

[6] For a more complete definition and discussion of grand strategy, see B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, second revised edition (New York: Meridian, 1967), 322, and Paul Kennedy, *Grand Strategy in War and Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 4.

[7] For more see Liddell Hart, 321, and Edward Luttwak, (fn. 5), chap. 6, 82-90.

[8] Lykke, 3.

encompassing only the actions of armed forces against a similar opponent or as a broader concept, where military forces play a lead role but are also supported by political, diplomatic, economic, and other actions. One example of a narrow conception is a definition by the historian Archer Jones; "The objective for military strategy...is the depletion of the military force of an adversary."[9] Two other historians, Williamson Murray and Mark Grimsley critique B.H. Liddell Hart's narrow definition of military strategy (and by extension, Jones' approach); "this forthright but unhappy example restricts the word strictly to *military* affairs, whereas in practice strategy operates in a much broader sphere."[10] This author will use a broader definition of military strategy, which includes the integration of non-military concerns, such as diplomacy, which are usually considered separate and outside the context of war.[11] When discussing military strategy in war, separation of politics and other concerns into distinct realms is a false division. In war, military action is the central activity but not an independent entity. It is directly linked to non-military concerns, and military strategy must be considered in conjunction with these issues.

There have been a number of theoretical military strategies put forward on how to achieve victory in war. Some of the more famous theories for what makes a successful military strategy focus only on the "means" or the "ways" part of the strategic equation. Examples of means-based strategic theories include those of Alfred Thayer Mahan, who

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[9] Archer Jones, *Elements of Military Strategy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), xiii. By using such a narrow definition, Jones is forced to add another term, political-military strategy. This author considers his narrow usage to be the same as or close to the definition of operational strategy.

[10] Williamson Murray and Mark Grimsley, "Introduction: On Strategy," in *The Making of Strategy*, ed. Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1.

[11] Some may argue that this is the province of grand strategy. This author's conception, however, is that war is merely one tool of grand strategy(which in turn should then focus on when it is used), while war is the main focus of military strategy(which defines its conduct). Making war's conduct the focus of grand strategy risks losing its wider perspective over all matters of war and peace. The consideration of the employment of military forces in isolation from other factors falls into the realm of operational art.

preached that sea power was the key to a nation's strength, and Guilio Douhet, who thought that air power would become the sole decisive factor in war. A prominent example of a ways-based strategic theory is B.H. Liddell Hart who claimed his "indirect approach" was the historically proven method to achieve victory. Many western commentators, when first exposed to guerrilla warfare following W.W. II, claimed that the way of revolutionary warfare was a decisive new form of strategy.[12] Yet none of these theories have proven one-hundred percent effective in bringing victory under all conditions.

There has been, however, at least one attempt made at a "unified" theory of strategy which accepts a variety of means and ways in war without claiming the superiority of any one. In 1967, Rear Admiral J.C. Wylie developed his theory of military strategy. Wylie simplified the bottom line for the military strategist:

> The primary aim...in the conduct of war is some selected degree of control of the enemy for the strategist's own purpose; this is achieved by control of the pattern of war; and this control of the pattern of war is had by manipulation of the center of gravity of war to the advantage of the strategist and the disadvantage of the opponent.[13]

In Wylie's theory of military strategy, the two key components are therefore the choice of an operational pattern and the identification of the enemy's center of gravity.

Wylie identified two separate operational patterns in war, the cumulative and the sequential.[14] A sequential pattern of war is a series of discrete steps which build upon each other. The sequence of actions leads to victory; loss of any one step could have critical repercussions on the strategy. On the other hand, in a cumulative pattern, the strategy is based upon "a collection of lesser actions," none of which is dependent on another. Wylie's distinction between sequential and cumulative operational patterns is quite similar

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[12] For one example, see Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*, trans. by Daniel Lee (New York: Praeger, 1961).

[13] Wylie, 77-78.

[14] Ibid., Chapter 3, 22-27.

to the "double form of strategy" seen by an nineteenth and early twentieth century military historian, Hans Delbruck.

Delbruck divided strategic patterns into those that seek to annihilate and those that seek to exhaust the enemy.[15] Delbruck defined an annihilation strategy as following the first natural principle of strategy which was:

> to assemble one's forces, seek out the main force of the enemy, defeat it, and follow up the victory until the defeated side subjects itself to the will of the victor and accepts his conditions, which means in the most extreme case up to occupation of the entire enemy country.[16]

This annihilation strategy follows a clear sequence which puts its emphasis on destroying the other's forces in battle. And as Delbruck observed, it "presupposes a sufficient superiority."

The exhaustion strategy, on the other hand, does not seek victory through a series of decisive battles. To Delbruck, a strategist who sought to exhaust his enemy did:

> not so much place his hopes on completely defeating the enemy as on wearing him out and exhausting him by blows and destruction of all kinds to the extent that in the end he prefers to accept the conditions of the victor, which in this case must always show a certain moderation.[17]

This was the strategy of weaker armies and those who would or could not risk all on a single decisive battle.

The second component of a military strategy is the center of gravity. Wylie described the center of gravity as a "national jugular vein," that is ideally both critical to the enemy and vulnerable to your strategy.[18] Both Sun Tzu and Clausewitz recognized the

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[15] Hans Delbruck, *The Dawn of Modern Warfare*, History of the Art of War, Vol. IV, trans. by Walter Renfroe (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 293-295. In this edition, the translator uses "attrition" instead of "exhaustion." Russell Weigley's work repeats the same usage. This is confusing, because Delbruck's usage is not the same as the modern operational usage(e.g. maneuver vs. attrition). I will refer to Delbruck's two forms of strategy as annihilation and exhaustion, as used by Gordon Craig, "Delbruck: The Military Historian," *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 341.

[16] Delbruck, 293.

[17] Ibid., 294.

[18] Wylie, 77.

concept of the center of gravity, although their treatment of the topic was different.[19] But it is clear that both recognized the center of gravity as more than merely military forces or a geographic location. The enemy's center of gravity can be any necessary factor for the execution of his strategy. In this sense, a center of gravity may be thought of as being the military force, its logistic support, the social cohesion of the nation, or the political alliances to sustain the effort.[20]

Center of gravity is usually defined in relation to the target of the strategy; theoretically, it is the opponent's one "hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends."[21] While such an approach has use as a planning tool when attempting to attack an opponent, it has less value in describing and understanding a state's strategic course of action. A state will not always correctly identify the opponent's center of gravity, nor will it always finds the means to attack it. Identifying the one supposed center of gravity after the fact is often a difficult and highly subjective process.

As used in this thesis, center of gravity will therefore be defined relative to the state implementing the strategy. In this sense, the center of gravity is the primary "defeat mechanism" by which the state seeks to gain victory. The defeat mechanism can be a tangible, physical goal, such as the destruction of the enemy's forces or the capture of his

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[19] Handel, *Masters of War*, chap.5.

[20] This is not only a modern construction. As Handel observes, "Sun Tzu...views the political, diplomatic and logistical preparations for war as well as the fighting as integral parts of the same activity."(*Masters of War*, 37) Clausewitz narrowed his main effort of On War to focus on what we now call the operational level of war.(*Masters of War*, 48) More recent observers have argued that we once again need to expand our conception of strategy. See Michael Howard, "The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy," in *The Causes of War*, second edition, (Cambridge: Harvard, 1983).

[21] Clausewitz as cited in Steven Metz and Frederick Downey, "Centers of Gravity and Strategic Planning," *Military Review* 68, no. 4 (April 1988): 24. For a summary of the modern conception of the center of gravity in relation to the enemy, see Jeffrey Harley, "Information, Technology, and the Center of Gravity," *Naval War College Review* 50, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 78-9.

capital, or a more abstract one, such as the breaking of the opponent's national will to persist in the war.[22]

Given this definition, which lays out the operational pattern and center of gravity as the key determinants of a military strategy, we can finally see what comprises an asymmetric strategy. Based on Wylie's model of strategy, a state has the choice of following a cumulative or a sequential operational pattern. Furthermore, it can direct this operational pattern at a tangible or an abstract center of gravity. An enemy's response can defined as asymmetric if: 1) its operational pattern is different from your own; and/or 2) if it is seeking to attack a different type of center of gravity than the one you have chosen. As shown in the strategic options matrix (Figure 2), a strategy is asymmetric if it occupies any quadrant separate from the enemy's approach. Furthermore, strategies which are horizontally or vertically opposed are partially asymmetric, while strategies in diagonal quadrants are fully asymmetric; they differ both in type of center of gravity and operational pattern.

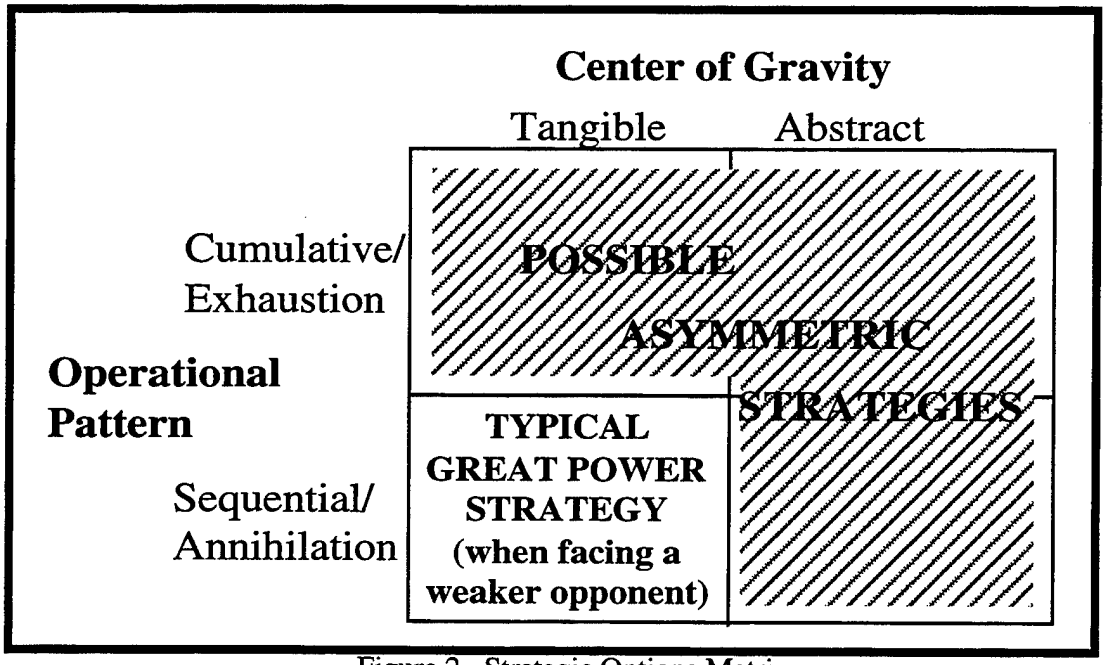


Figure 2. Strategic Options Matrix

[22] Metz and Downey, 26, make the distinction between tangible and psychological centers of gravity.

Great powers, when confronted with a weaker opponent, usually choose strategies which occupy the lower-left quadrant. As Delbruck observed, they feel their material and technological preponderance should allow them rapid success on the battlefield. Russell Weigley examined the experience of the United States and found an American preference for strategies of the lower-left quadrant. In Weigley's words, "the wealth of the country and its adoption of unlimited aims in war cut that development [of alternate approaches] short, until the strategy of annihilation [of enemy forces] became characteristically the American way of war."[23]

A final definition we should consider is that of victory (and its opposite, defeat). Victory, in relation to the most general definition of strategy, is the accomplishment of the goals set forth by the state at the beginning of war. States, however, do not always achieve their goals or stick to them. If a state is compelled to change or reduce its war aims, this could be considered a partial victory or minor defeat. Making a determination as to which side of the line the outcome lies on can be done by relating it to the state's initial war aims; a small change might still yield some aspects of victory, while a large deviation is probably a defeat.

## B. HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

Admiral Wylie's model alone does not predict success or failure of a given strategy. It serves merely as a tool to help define asymmetric strategy and illuminate possible strategic options. A single model is unlikely to do more than this because, as Murray and Grimsley observe, "while models and categories may assist analysis, they can offer no formulas for the successful framing of strategy or conduct of war. Theories all too often

[23] Weigley, xxii.

aim at fixed values, but in war and strategy most things are uncertain and variable."[24] Therefore, to answer the question of "when may asymmetric strategies used by weak states against great powers be effective?" we must look beyond Wylie's model. As mentioned before, no single "strategy" has proven effective in all circumstances. Victory appears to be the result of finding the right strategy for the given circumstances. If we accept that the inter-state wars in America's future will be of the great power-weak state type and involve asymmetric technological capabilities, we should consider "what additional conditions could lead to success for the weak state's strategy?" By framing the question as narrowly as possible, we should be able to minimize the uncertainties and variables which would affect our analysis of strategy if considered in a wider context.

A number of explanations for the success of asymmetric strategies have been put forward. These explanations will be treated as independent variables which, when combined with asymmetric strategies under the conditions mentioned before, produce the dependent variable, victory. These hypotheses of what is required to make an asymmetric strategy successful are 1) the need for a skilled army; 2) the importance of having a superior (asymmetric) national will relative to your enemy; and 3) reliance on external support.

The first hypothesis is that to make any strategy work and achieve victory, a skilled army is required. Using a statistical analysis of conflicts, John Arquilla found that the skill of the army makes the difference in wars on land.[25] China's most prominent political figure and strategist of the modern age, Mao Tse-tung, reached the same conclusion. Shu Guang Zhang summarizes Mao's thinking: "In his view, if one side's subjective ability in directing war was superior to the other's, its inferior military capability could turn into a

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[24] Murray and Grimsley, 1.

[25] John Arquilla, *Dubious Battles* (Washington, D.C.: Crane Russak, 1992), 83.

superior one."[26] More recently, Stephen Biddle of the Institute for Defense Analysis has found that technology alone does not decide battle outcomes; instead, it must be considered hand-in-hand with the skill differentials between the fighting forces.[27] He concludes that "If one's own skills are high, one is insulated to an important degree against variations in opposing technology, even if one's own weapons change only incrementally."[28]

The problem, then, is in determining what makes a skilled army. Arquilla and others use a battle death ratio between sides to determine skill. Such a measure has a major flaw: a technologically inferior army may deliberately suffer higher casualties in order to compensate for its material deficiencies. In Afghanistan, the rebels suffered between 1.5 and 2.4 casualties for every Soviet or government soldier killed or wounded.[29] Yet most would acknowledge that the rebels fought with greater skill, especially in the face of the technological superiority of their opponents.

Because of the limitations of quantitative data in conflicts with asymmetric technology, we should judge a skilled army by qualitative measures. Specifically, how does the skill of the weaker state's army compare to the opponent's? Has the army of the weaker state been able to adapt to the disadvantaged circumstances under which it is fighting? Has it been able to develop effective responses to counter the opponent's technology? And is the army still able to conduct operations which support the leadership's strategy for victory?

A second possible requirement to implement an asymmetric strategy may be a superior political will to bear heavy casualties and continue the fight under extremely discouraging circumstances. Clausewitz recognized that victory in war required more than

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[26] Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 20.

[27] Stephen Biddle, "Victory Misunderstood," *International Security* 21, No. 2 (Fall 1996), 139-179.

[28] Ibid., 177.

[29] Data from Anthony Cordesman and Abraham Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume III* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), 10.

the physical acts of destroying an enemy's army and occupying his land; it also was necessary to break the enemy's will to fight.[30] More recently, Andrew Mack put forward a "pre-theoretical perspective" on conflicts between nations with asymmetric "wills."[31] Mack recognized that the disparity in interests between the weaker and the greater power could result in a disparity between the two sides' endurance and willingness to continue fighting. Faced with a weaker state's strategy of exhaustion, the great power, who is not fighting for national survival, suffers internal and external political constraints which could lead to its defeat(or at least withdrawal from the conflict). Mack concludes that these considerations mean that "the military struggle on the ground must be evaluated not in terms of the narrow calculus of military tactics, but in terms of its political impact in the [great power]."[32] Most recently, Stephen Peter Rosen put forward hypotheses that "the social structures of the political unit can affect its ability to generate military power."[33] Rosen also sees that society's problems can possibly spillover into the military organization itself.

We can judge the relative differential of national will between the two sides by asking the following questions: Did either side face internal dissent to the war? If there was internal dissent, did it affect the national leadership in their choices about the conduct and continuation of the war? Did either side restrain its operations due to any internal political considerations? And did internal dissent have a resulting effect on the nation's military forces?

The final possible requirement for a successful asymmetric strategy is external support. Michael Handel has found that:

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[30] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), 90.

[31] Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," *World Politics* 27, no.1 (Oct 1974), 175-200.

[32] Ibid., 179.

[33] Stephen Peter Rosen, *Societies and Military Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 30.

> One of the major differences between the weak states and the great powers is that the weak states rely much more heavily on *external* strength when they are fighting against other weak states supported by a great power, or directly against a great power.[34]

We can subdivide external support into four types. The first is moral or diplomatic support; usually this takes the form of public speeches or demonstrations by an external power. The second is material or volunteer support. This includes weapons, ammunition, supplies and individuals or small units in support or combat roles. The last two types of support involve external direct intervention. Intervention is more than the introduction of "volunteers" to fight under the control and the flag of the weak state; it is the commitment of the combat units of an external power to fight under their own flag and take a direct role in operations against the great power. Intervention may be threatened (one form of support) or actually implemented (the last type of support). This thesis will not consider cases with the last form of support because external intervention changes the dynamics of the conflict and may eliminate the need to follow an asymmetric strategy.

In evaluating these variables on asymmetric strategies, we face three methodological problems. First, the sample size is relatively small. Second, war and strategy are about the interaction of at least two players and not just one. Third, strategy, in the recent words of one theorist, has dynamic inter-dimensional characteristics.[35] With the proper consideration, however, none of these concerns is overwhelming.

Because relevant cases for this study must meet three requirements, the sample size is limited. First, the conflict must be a great power-weak state war. Second, the great power must have asymmetric technological capabilities. Third, the weak state must have attempted an asymmetric strategy. Of these, the last is the most limiting. Although there have been a large number of great power-weak state wars between armies with asymmetric weapons since the time of Cortez's conquest of the Aztecs, they have generally resulted in

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[34] Handel, *Weak States in the International System*, 103.

[35] See Antulio Echevarria, "Dynamic Inter-Dimensionality," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 15 (Spring 1997), 29-36.

the defeat of the technologically weaker side due to a reliance on symmetric strategies.[36] Zulus, Burmans, Indians, Dervishes, and others proved willing to charge directly into the face of British firepower and that of the other colonial powers.[37]

More recently, strategies for resisting great powers have either become non-existent or more sophisticated. America's most recent interventions throughout Latin America have generally been conducted in the face of weak strategies. Grenada, Panama, and Haiti are examples of U.S. intervention against opponents with little or no strategy to respond. But there are still some cases which meet our requirements. Among these are the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935, the Russo-Finnish War of 1939, and the American's involvement in Vietnam, 1965-1973.[38] The limited sample size prevents a statistical or quantitatively based analysis of asymmetric strategy under the conditions we have set, but still allows for a case study approach. The limited number of cases also serves as a reminder that weak states will not always make the most rational choice or be able to implement an asymmetric strategy.

Second, in mathematical terms, strategy is a two-player interactive game where the qualities and actions of both sides together determine the outcome of the event. To take this into account, we must examine relative, and not absolute, values when considering the skill of weaker side's army. The two-player nature of war also yields a fourth possible hypothesis for the success or failure of an asymmetric strategy: victory is only possible if the great power fails to take action to counter the asymmetric strategy. We should examine

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[36] Trevor Dupuy, *Understanding Defeat*, second edition (McLean, Va.: NOVA, 1990), 60-61.

[37] Mao Tse-tung came to this conclusion. In an essay on Mao, E. L. Katzenbach writes "By and large, it would seem true that what made the machinery of European troops so successful was that native troops saw fit to die, with glory, with honor, en masse, and in vain." See E. L. Katzenbach, "Time, Space, and Will: The Politico-Military Views of Mao Tse-tung," in *The Guerrilla- and How to Fight Him*, ed. by T.N. Greene (New York: Praeger, 1962), 14-15.

[38] I also considered the 1979-1988 war between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan as a possible case. On the spectrum of conflict, the war was more an intra-state insurgency with external intervention as opposed to a great power-weak power interstate war. Also, although Soviet operations are relatively well covered, data on Afghani strategy and operations is considerably more difficult to come by.

this by looking at whether the great power recognized the opponent's asymmetric strategy and took action to disrupt or undermine it or any of the other hypothesized critical factors (skill, national will, and external support).

Third, as one military theorist has recently observed, strategy is a dynamic inter-dimensional problem covering many areas that are usually considered separately in scholarly works. By using a broad definition of military strategy and recognizing that the center of gravity may be more than military forces or geography, we have also grappled with part of this problem. We must also consider that "the multiple dimensions of interact dynamically."[39] We can take this into account by not only looking for relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable, but also by considering the interaction between the independent variables themselves.

The following chapters will individually cover the Italo-Ethiopian, Russo-Finnish, and American-North Vietnamese Wars. Each chapter will begin by examining the nature of the great power's asymmetric technology and the weak state's asymmetric strategy. Next, the operational course of the war will be reviewed. Finally, each of the four hypotheses will be considered in relation to the outcome of the war. After covering the three cases, the concluding chapter will evaluate the asymmetric strategy and the hypotheses in light of current and projected trends.

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[39] Echevarria, 35.

# III . THE ITALO-ETHIOPIAN WAR(1935-1936)

## A. THE CONFLICT

### 1. Background

The 1935 war was not the first conflict between Italy and Ethiopia. Italy had been interested in Ethiopia, Eritrea to the north, and Somaliland to the east since 1857. Modern Ethiopia began its transformation from a feudal society to a centralized state in 1855.[1] In January 1887, Yohannes, one of the Ethiopian feudal leaders attempting to unify the country, defeated an Italian force at Dogali. In response, the Italians reinforced their troops and concluded an alliance with Yohannes' rival, Menelik II. In doing so, the Italians occupied Eritrea, north of Ethiopia, as a colony and established a fraudulent protectorate over the remainder of Ethiopia. Menelik resisted Italy's plans for expansion and, by 1894, both sides were preparing for war. On March 1, 1896, Menelik's army decimated an Italian force at Adowa, winning "the greatest victory black Africans ever achieved over a European foe."[2] Italy was forced to recognize Ethiopian independence, although a clear border was never demarcated between Eritrea, still under Italian control, and its neighbor to the south. This would remain a constant source of tension over the years.

In spite of the battlefield defeat at Adowa, Italy never relinquished its plans for a larger empire. The Italian leadership hoped to include Ethiopia into their empire after Menelik's death. Following World War I, they were unable to realize their goals at the Paris Peace Conference. The Italians were also unable to take advantage of internal

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[1] Historical background primarily comes from Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia* (New York: Praeger, 1965), and Brian Sullivan, "The Italo-Ethiopian War," in *Great Powers and Little Wars*, ed. by A. Hamish Ion and E.J. Errington (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 169-175.

[2] There is not a single consistent system for translating Ethiopian to English. For instance, Adowa is also translated as Adua, Adwa, or Aduwa. This thesis will use the most common usage from among the sources consulted. Quote from Sullivan, 172.

Ethiopian strife for the succession of the Emperor's throne. Haile Selassie took the throne in 1930, unifying Ethiopia to an extent unseen since Menelik's death in 1913.

With the rise of fascism and the government of Benito Mussolini in 1922, Italian imperialism took on a more aggressive character. Despite overt diplomatic moves towards peace, Mussolini was planning for a military conquest of Ethiopia as early as 1925.[3] In 1934, with the desired conditions established, Italy used the Wal-Wal border skirmish between Ethiopia and Eritrea to justify a mobilization which would lead to war in the following year.[4]

## 2. Asymmetric Weapons and Technology

> In everything except overall numbers, the Ethiopians were far worse equipped than the fascists and their colonial troops.[5]

The overinflated Italian estimate of Ethiopian forces at the beginning of the war was 350,000 rifle-armed men, 200 pieces of artillery, fifty anti-aircraft guns, and a few armored cars.[6] The first Italian force moved to Africa had more than 200,000 men, 6000 machine guns, 700 cannon, 150 tanks, and 150 combat aircraft.[7] This force was significantly reinforced both before and during the war. The Italians also supplemented their manpower with colonial forces.[8] This numerical balance, however, belies the significant technological asymmetries between the two combatants.

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[3] Diplomatic gestures by Italy included supporting Ethiopia's entry into the League of Nations in 1923 and the Treaty of Friendship in 1928. As will be shown later, these moves masked Italy's aggressive intentions. On entry into the League, see George Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 10-14. On the treaty, see Baer, 19-20. On Mussolini's planning, see Angelo Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War*, trans. P.D. Cummins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 8-16.

[4] On Wal-Wal, see Baer, chap. 3, 45-61; and Del Boca, 19-20.

[5] Greenfield, 194.

[6] Del Boca, 37.

[7] Ibid., 22.

[8] A large number of colonial troops served with the Italian army during the war. They included Askaris from Eritrea, Dubats from Somaliland, and Libyans. Various ethnic groups opposed to Selassie's

On land, Ethiopian forces were at least a generation behind the Italians in terms of equipment. Ethiopia had only enough modern rifles to outfit about 75,000 men; most of their other small arms dated from the late-nineteenth century. Some even went into battle with spears, swords, or clubs. The few hundred machine guns of Haile Selassie's army made them specialty weapons; in Mussolini's army, they were numerous enough to be a regular arm of every company. Ethiopian artillery was obsolete; their guns were built on the rigid gun carriages of the previous century. Because of their old design, Ethiopian cannon were unable to deliver accurate indirect fires. Italy, on the other hand, possessed modern cannon which allowed massed bombardments from outside line-of-sight to the target. Of the primary ground combat weapons of the time (rifles, machine guns, tanks, and artillery), Italy had a decisive qualitative edge in all four types.[9]

The balance in the air was even more skewed. Although Ethiopia had ten or fifteen aircraft, they were biplanes, obsolete for all but reconnaissance, medical evacuation, or light transport purposes.[10] For air defense, there were only thirteen antiaircraft guns in the entire country. And besides the Emperor, few if any Ethiopians understood the implications of modern air power. Italy, on the other hand, relative to the Ethiopians had a robust air force of bombers, fighters, and reconnaissance aircraft.[11] Having produced Guilio Douhet, one of the earliest air power theorists, Italy also had the vision to use aircraft to their full effect.

Finally, there were three other significant asymmetries between Italy and Ethiopia: logistics, command-and-control, communications and intelligence($C^3I$), and special weapons. The Ethiopians were hampered logistically by their wide variety of types of

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government, such as the Azebu Gallas, also served Italy during the war. See A.J. Barker, *The Civilizing Mission* (New York: The Dial Press, 1968), 345-7.

[9] On land force asymmetries, see Baer, 224; Barker, 148-9; Del Boca, 37; James Dugan and Laurence Lafore, *Days of Emperor and Clown* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 168-170; and Sullivan, 179.

[10] Del Boca, 91-92.

[11] Barker, 347.

weapons. Many of their soldiers carried the wrong ammunition for their personal weapons. As A.J. Barker noted, the Ethiopians:

> had no transport, no organized supply service, no medical arrangements, and when their own paltry rations ran out they had to depend on local supplies, or, like the Boer commandos, they had to return home.[12]

While the Italian supply situation was difficult, they could at least take care of their soldiers, move heavy weapons, and supply enough ammunition for the indiscriminate use of massed firepower.

In terms of $C^3I$, Ethiopia had enough radios to provide communications between its armies.[13] Possession of this technology, however, did not ensure its use. Ras Mulugeta, the Minister of War, failed to take a field radio as he moved north with an army of 80,000.[14] The traditional nature of Ethiopia's leaders and army was not its only problem. Italy's efficient intelligence gathering operation had secured Ethiopia's codes. As Brian Sullivan noted, "throughout the war, the Italians would have detailed information on all Ethiopian plans, movements, and problems."[15]

The final asymmetry was in what today is referred to as weapons of mass destruction. The Italians brought large quantities of chemical weapons, primarily mustard gas, into the theater. During the war, they would show little or no restraint in its use. Ethiopia had no ability either to respond in kind or to take defensive countermeasures. In his history of the war, Angelo Del Boca quoted a French journalist's prophecy of the war and then commented on how accurate yet incomplete it was:

> "Before [the Ethiopians] meet the Europeans, they will endure five levels of hell. The bombs from the air. The shelling from long-range

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[12] Ibid., 149.

[13] Sullivan, 180.

[14] Information from George Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, as quoted in Leonard Mosley, *Haile Selassie* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 202.

[15] Sullivan, 182.

> howitzers. The deadly sputter of machine guns. The tanks. The Askaris." He forget to mention a sixth and even more frightful hell- the hell of mustard gas.[16]

Against these asymmetries, Haile Selassie could counter with a only partially asymmetric strategy.

### 3. Asymmetric Strategy

In the introduction, military strategy was described as having two key components: the center of gravity and the operational pattern. The Italian strategy focused on traditional centers of gravity: the Ethiopian army and the capital of Addis Ababa. To attack these critical points, the Italians used a sequential strategy of major battles to annihilate the Ethiopian forces and gain access to the capital. Against the Italians, Haile Selassie devised a strategy which was only partially asymmetric.

Haile Selassie realized he could not win a military confrontation with Italy. Del Boca quotes Selassie as saying, "We did not even contemplate fighting a European-style war. Moreover, it would have been impossible, as what we had in the way of artillery, even machine guns, was laughable."[17] To prevent or win the oncoming war, Selassie chose an abstract center of gravity; all hope of victory was placed on mobilizing the moral support of the world to limit Italy's freedom of action within the international system. External support and foreign intervention became the tool which Selassie sought to leverage to affect this center of gravity. By appealing to the League of Nations and various great powers, the Emperor hoped to gain both support for his cause and international action to stop or rollback the Italian offensive.

Ethiopia sought to invoke the conflict-resolution and collective security terms of the League of Nations. Immediately after the Wal-Wal border incident which Italy used as a pretext for its pre-offensive mobilization, Ethiopia went to the League of Nations. In the nine months before the war and after its initiation, Ethiopia would continue to make appeals

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[16] Pierre Bonardi, cited in Del Boca, 198.

[17] Del Boca, 37.

to the League.[18] Selassie also attempted to grant oil concessions to American firms to gain the support of the United States.[19] The Roosevelt administration, however, managed to have the concessions canceled; America would not compromise its isolation for unproven oil reserves.

To reach this center of gravity once the invasion began, however, Selassie used an operational pattern which could not directly or indirectly achieve or support his goals. Selassie and his army did not fight a 'guerrilla war.' Instead of choosing such a cumulative-exhaustion approach, which might have bought time for popular support around the world to force governments into action, Selassie's forces fought a series of sequential battles which sought the annihilation of Italian forces. While the Emperor realized the impossibility of fighting a 'modern war' of this manner, he was forced to accept it because of the traditional nature of his army and the ethnic divisions of his country. The nature of these factors and their influence will be discussed in a later section.

Compounding the error of this choice, the Emperor both delayed the mobilization of his forces to the last minute before the invasion and withdrew his forward forces at least thirty kilometers south of the border.[20] While these actions pleased the League of Nations, they made a poor operational pattern worse. And other options which might have made a sequential-annihilation pattern possible, such as a preemptive offensive against Italian ports in Eritrea, were rejected. Selassie's choice of center of gravity prevented their consideration. In the end, this partially asymmetric strategy resulted in defeat. Although the choice of an abstract center of gravity, using the international system to gain support

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[18] See Baer, esp. 99, 111-112, 115, 234-5, 315.

[19] See Brice Harris, *The United States and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 35-38.

[20] Selassie waited until September 28 to mobilize his army; Del Boca, 37. On his withdrawal to create a neutral zone, see Del Boca, 45-47.

and stop Italy, had some promise, the use of a sequential operational pattern meant the war would be fought on Italy's terms.

### 4. The Course of the War and its Outcome:

Italian forces crossed the border in the north from Eritrea on October 3, 1935. Because Ethiopian forces had withdrawn to create a thirty-kilometer neutral zone, the invading army initially made a rapid advance and seized Adowa and two other towns by October 6. Their advance was also helped by the defection of one of Selassie's princes with his small army.[21] The underdeveloped country and the logistical demands for such a large modern army, however, prevented an Italian *blitzkrieg*-like strike all the way to the capital. By November 7, the need to fix the supply situation halted the Italians after the seizure of the town of Makalle.

Because Mussolini feared the risk of international involvement in the conflict, he replaced his first commander-in-chief, de Bono, with Marshal Pietro Badoglio in mid-November. After the delay at Makalle, Mussolini regarded de Bono as insufficiently aggressive to pursue a quick end to the campaign. Badoglio prepared to resume the offensive, but his plans were disrupted by a Ethiopian counterattack beginning December 15. Selassie's forces launched an attack with elements of three large armies to turn the Italian's right flank. The Ethiopian armies, however, made lucrative targets for Italian firepower and poison gas, the latter of which was first used in the war on December 23.[22] With these weapons, the Italians managed to break up and destroy the large Ethiopian formations and end their "Christmas Offensive." A similar pattern would be repeated in all the major battles of the war.

In the southeastern portion of Ethiopia, Italian plans to launch a ground offensive out of Somalia had been delayed by heavy rains in October. Throughout October and November, however, Ethiopian forces had been subjected to aerial attack. Tormented by

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[21] Mosley, 198-200.

[22] Del Boca, 78-81.

their inability to respond to such an air assault, the Ethiopians ventured forward to mount a preemptive strike against the Italian bases in Somalia. Unfortunately, such an attack required a movement of over 400 kilometers in largely open terrain. Ethiopian logistics were not up to the task, their communications had been intercepted by the Italians, and air power bled their long warrior columns along the entire route. By the time General Graziani initiated the first major Italian offensive from Somalia on January 12, 1936, his attack became a pursuit of the weakened and demoralized Ethiopian forces.

In the north, a second Ethiopian counterattack on January 19 failed in less than six days. The Italians then regained the initiative and decimated Ethiopian forces in three major battles from 10 February through March 3. In late March, Haile Selassie was forced to venture out of the capital with his strategic reserve and move north to stabilize the situation. His forces launched a final counterattack at Mai Chew on March 30. Despite the brave fighting of Selassie's best forces, they were repulsed. On their retreat towards the capital, they were then decimated by unrelenting air attacks. On May 1, 1936, Ethiopia's emperor left his country, going into exile in Europe. Badoglio's forces entered the capital on May 5 and linked up with Graziani's forces on May 9. On the same day, Mussolini proclaimed victory in Rome.

The war effort was not cheap for Italy. Over 360,000 military personnel and civilian workers served in East Africa during the war.[23] The Italians, not including their colonial troops, had lost at least two thousand killed.[24] Italy also had spent almost 12.1 billion lire on the war effort, equivalent to $10 billion in 1970, an astronomical sum for a country struggling to recover from economic depression.[25]

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[23] See Barker, 348; Sullivan, 185, mentions a higher figure of over 600,000.

[24] see Barker, 316; Dugan, 295; Sullivan, 185, again mentions a higher figure of 10-12,000 Italians killed, and around 200,000 wounded or stricken with disease.

[25] Dugan 295; Sullivan, 185, gives a higher figure of 38.9 billion lire.

The cost to Ethiopia was far worse. An estimated 275,000 warriors and civilians were killed.[26] Many towns had been destroyed. Their government had been driven abroad. In spite of this death and destruction, some Ethiopians genuinely welcomed the onset of foreign rule.[27] This situation would change, however, as Italian control and repression of the populace grew.

The conventional war which ended in May 1936 was followed by guerrilla operations from a few remnants of Selassie's army. This initial resistance was eliminated by mid-February 1937.[28] But brutal Italian reprisals in response to an assassination attempt on the governor general, eliminated any goodwill towards the Italians and sparked further low-level resistance. This popular resistance was sporadic, unorganized, and resulted in the slaughter of 300,000-400,000 more Ethiopians for little gain.[29] Even though the occupation of Ethiopia continued to require a large commitment of Italian resources, only the beginning of World War II and the intervention of British forces would return Haile Selassie to his throne.

## B. HYPOTHESES APPLIED TO THE ITALO-ETHIOPIAN WAR

### 1. Skilled Army

In the introduction, skill was described as a concept which must be considered relative to an opponent, not in isolation. Additionally, three questions were presented as the basis for evaluating the skill of a technologically disadvantaged army. These questions are: has the army of the weaker state been able to adapt to the disadvantaged circumstances

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[26] Barker, 316; Del Boca, 274-275, Sullivan, 185.

[27] "Despite this cruelty, many educated Ethiopians had rallied to the Italians, including Ethiopians who returned from Europe." Sullivan, 187.

[28] Sullivan, 187.

[29] Ibid., 194.

under which it is fighting? Has it been able to develop effective responses to counter the opponent's technology? And is the army still able to conduct operations which support the leadership's strategy for victory? Haile Selassie's army was both unskilled relative to the Italians and it failed to meet all three measures.

The Italian army that Ethiopia faced was neither of high nor uniform quality. It consisted of regular army soldiers, hastily recruited and trained Fascist 'blackshirts', and colonial levees.[30] These forces were organized under contemporary European lines and responded to a centralized headquarters. While Italian forces would prove themselves generally unskilled relative to their opponents in World War II, their level or training, organization, and weaponry would prove more than an match for Haile Selassie's army. As George Baer noted:

> The Italian army of 1935 was not the careless and harried army of 1896, but a knowledgeable, mobilized armored force capable of breaking up frontal assaults and mass attacks with artillery fire, with machine guns, and above all with bombings and strafings from the air.[31]

With the advantage of superior firepower, the quality of Italy's military was good enough to defeat an army stuck to the methods of the nineteenth century.

The nature of the Ethiopia's army was sufficient for victory in 1896, but obsolete by the standards of the 1930s. Only a small portion of his force could be considered "professional" in the contemporary usage of the word.[32] The majority of the warriors were mobilized in separate armies led by warrior princes. With titles like *Fitorari* or "Front of the Rhinoceros", these princes were expected to lead their mass armies from the front into decisive battles with the enemy. These leaders and their warriors felt a great confidence in their skills. The memories of their previous victory at Adowa in 1896 had fed what Haile Selassie recognized as the two worst faults of his people: "overweening bravery and

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[30] Barker, 156-160.

[31] Baer, 223.

[32] On the nature of the Ethiopian army, see Baer, 222-3; Barker, 147-9.

superlative arrogance."[33] Because of these attitudes and Ethiopia's isolation from the world, the army neither equipped itself for modern warfare, nor did it seek to understand the trends in technology, organization, and tactics which had arisen since 1896.

In the fighting that began on October 1935, Ethiopia had little success in countering the land and air forces of Italy. Ethiopian warriors disabled tanks and killed their crews on a few occasions, but only through the intervention of luck and at great cost to themselves.[34] But for the most part, the common soldier and his leaders were too shocked at the brutal punishment dealt to them by aircraft, massed artillery, and poison gas. One warrior chief said in response to the use of mustard gas, "My chiefs surrounded me, asking wildly what they should do, but I was completely stunned. I didn't know what to tell them. I didn't know how to fight this terrible rain that burned and killed."[35] The Emperor himself was one of the few who understood the nature of the modern weapons facing Ethiopia; Selassie personally drafted tactical drills in response to the air threat.[36] His singular efforts, however, could not be disseminated and adopted in time by such a large, decentralized, and self-confident force.

Finally, Selassie's army was incapable of executing anything but a sequential operational pattern which sought the annihilation of the enemy. Because of the traditions and attitudes mentioned earlier, Ethiopia's warrior-leaders(except for Selassie) rejected the possibility of a cumulative-exhaustion campaign along the lines of guerrilla warfare. One prince responded to the emperor's suggestion of a cumulative-type campaign with, "A descendant of the Negus Yohannes makes war, but cannot carry on guerrilla warfare like a

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[33] Mosley, 203.

[34] For two examples, see Del Boca, 75, 118.

[35] As quoted in David Large, "Mussolini's 'Civilizing Mission'," *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1993), 52.

[36] One example of the Emperor's personal writings: "When an aeroplane is sighted, one should leave large open roads and wide meadows and march in valleys and trenches and by zigzag routes, along places which have trees and woods." From Haile Sellassie, *The Autobiography of...*, trans. by E. Ullendorff (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 236-37. See also Mosley, 203-4.

brigand chief!"[37] It should also be noted the ethnic makeup of Ethiopia also hindered the adoption of a guerrilla warfare strategy; this will be discussed in the next section.

### 2. Will of the People

The introduction listed some possible measures to evaluate the relative differential in national will between two powers and there effects on war. The measure are: Did either side restrain its operations due to any internal or external political considerations? Did either side face internal dissent to the war? If there was internal dissent, did it affect the national leadership in their choices about the conduct and continuation of the war? And did internal dissent have a resulting effect on the nation's military forces? While Italy was a cohesive nation with a relatively unified will to accept the costs and risks of war, Ethiopia was fractured by ethnic division and internal strife. Furthermore, Ethiopia's problems were compounded by its opponent. These internal problems both affected Ethiopia's strategic choices and reduced its military effectiveness.

Mussolini had prepared his population well for war. As Angelo Del Boca remarked, "thirteen years of Fascist propaganda and indoctrination had made an indelible mark on the Italians, particularly on the younger generation."[38] Italy was subjected to a barrage of revisionist calls for the revenge of Adowa. Britain's diplomatic efforts to prevent the war also played into Mussolini's hands, uniting the Italian nation behind him in the face of such a strong "enemy."[39] Italy had managed to obtain the blessing of prominent Catholic figures, although not the Pope himself.[40] An Italian writer who was not in

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[37] Ras Seyoum, as quoted in Greenfield, 201.

[38] Del Boca, 26, see also Baer, 140-141.

[39] Baer, 158-9.

[40] Del Boca, 28, footnote 26.

sympathy with the Fascists later observed, "The vast majority of Italians, particularly the younger generation, hailed the colonial enterprise with sincere enthusiasm."[41]

Ethiopia's population, however, was not similarly united for the defense of its country. Selassie's country was not fully a nation-state; it still bore much of its feudal identity. Provincial governments, with each with a separate ethnic majority, did not always recognize the Emperor's rule, nor did they always have harmonious relations with their neighboring provinces.[42] Along with the traditional attitudes of the Ethiopian army, this ethnic diversity and tension would serve to prevent guerrilla warfare from being a feasible course of action. Ethnic antagonisms would have hindered the ability of warriors to obtain food, shelter, and other supplies from the populace.[43]

Ethiopia's internal problems were exacerbated by Italian actions. The historian Richard Greenfield quoted a contemporary observer of Ethiopia during this time who "wrote of the damage being done to Ethiopia's national interests by local chiefs who had accepted Italian bribes:"

> They are hopelessly irreconcilable and say quite plainly "rather Italy than Haile Selassie". The emperor has many enemies who will make war and help the Italians to hunt him down.[44]

The first Italian commander-in-chief of the war effort estimated that their subversive efforts deprived Ethiopia of "at least 200,000 men who either did not take up arms or who, although enrolled and armed remained inert."[45] The Italians were perceptive enough not only to see the weaknesses in Selassie's country, but to take action to magnify them.

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[41] Ruggero Zangrandi, as quoted in Del Boca, 26.

[42] Greenfield, 176-184.

[43] See Baer, 223-4; Sullivan, 180.

[44] Greenfield, 193.

[45] General de Bono, as quoted in Del Boca, 13.

### 3. External Support

Despite a strategy which depended on external support, Ethiopia was unable to obtain much aid from foreign sources. Such aid was critical because Ethiopia could neither produce its own arms, nor match the Italian army and air force. The world's other significant powers failed to provide any such aid to Ethiopia because of their own concerns about preventing or avoiding war and other significant international problems, such as Germany's rising power. And while popular support for Ethiopia grew in many countries, the war did not last long enough for such support to push any government to take aggressive action against Italy.

The League of Nations was dependent on British and French leadership. Yet these two nations were concerned with other problems, most notably Germany's rearmament.[46] As a result, France wanted Italy as an ally against the growing German threat. Britain, although a more ardent supporter of the league, had a strong pacifist movement and a fear of risking its own sea power.[47] The only other major power with possible leverage, the United States, was not a member of the League and beset with its own domestic proclivity towards neutrality.[48] As a result, the League and the other major powers were unable to take any decisive action to stop the war.

Once the war began, the League was still unwilling to risk any action which might lead to a wider war. Minor sanctions were applied against Italy, but the one action which could cripple its war effort, oil sanctions, was avoided.[49] And although the League and its member nations agreed to prohibit arms sales to Italy, which was largely self-sufficient, it

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[46] Baer, 100, Harris, 7.

[47] Baer, 269, on sea power, 258-259.

[48] Harris, 25.

[49] Harris, 70-71; see also Barker, chap. 10, 191-210.

made no effort to provide arms to Ethiopia.[50] By December 1935, instead of seeking to aid Ethiopia, Hoare and Laval, the foreign ministers of Britain and France, sought a compromise agreement which would retain the nominal independence of Ethiopia at the cost of much of its territory. Once revealed, however, this plan spurred public condemnation which cost Hoare his job, and undermined the League's attempts to secure American support for collective action.[51]

In contrast to the inaction of the leadership of the major powers, the common people of Britain and America generally demonstrated strong support for Ethiopia. Large rallies were held in Britain and the United States.[52] Citizens in both countries sent numerous letters of support to the emperor.[53] Public opinion had caused Hoare's downfall and drove his replacement, Anthony Eden, towards decisive action. But the German occupation of the Rhineland on March 7, 1936, distracted world attention away from Ethiopia.[54] By the time the League again reconsidered Ethiopia, there was no hope of helping Haile Selassie and his country.

Throughout the war, Ethiopia received little meaningful external support. The greatest contribution came from a few volunteer aviators, a handful of military advisers, and about fifty foreign doctors who attempted to provide aid to Selassie's large army.[55] But these efforts did not slow Italy's progress or mitigate their vicious prosecution of the war. Furthermore, no effort was made to correct Ethiopia's deficiencies in weaponry and ammunition. Ethiopia faced Italy with nothing but moral support.

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[50] Harris, 71; European nations would not even supply credit to Ethiopia, see Baer 226-7; Mosley, 194; ironically the only major wartime arms shipment to Ethiopia was rifles from Hitler, Del Boca, 132.

[51] Harris, 109-111.

[52] Del Boca, 41.

[53] Del Boca, 96-97; Harris, 92.

[54] Harris, 133-135.

[55] Del Boca, chap. 7, 85-97.

### 4. Opponent's Counter Strategy

The fourth possible contextual variable we can examine is the presence and effectiveness of the opponent's counter strategy in the face of the weak state's asymmetric strategy. Has the enemy recognized the asymmetric strategy and developed countermeasures? If so, how effective are they? In the case of the Italo-Ethiopian war, Italy both perceived the threat from Haile Selassie's choice of a center of gravity and took effective measures to protect their own strategy.

Ethiopia's hope was to use the League of Nations to gain external support to deter, prevent, or repel Italy's aggression. Mussolini recognized the threat from this strategy both before and during the war. George Baer's chronicle of the months prior to the war demonstrates the deliberate Italian diplomatic manipulation of the League's processes and great power politics to prevent foreign intervention. By requests for delays, unresponsive replies, and the interjection of tangential issues, Italy managed to prevent the League from considering any substantive issue which could have slowed or prevented the Italian buildup prior to the invasion.[56]

From the onset of the war to its conclusion, Italy deliberately manipulated information and perceptions to undermine external support for Ethiopia. Italy attempted to claim its aggression was within the League's mandate. Ethiopia was presented as hostile because of its mobilization for war and unfit for League membership because of its tolerance of slavery. This action delayed the League's response to the invasion. Combined with veiled threats to oppose any external intervention, this sufficed to deter the League from taking any action significant enough to harm Italy's war effort. To sway the Americans, who were outside the League, Mussolini allowed President Roosevelt's personal representative, William Donovan, to visit his army in Ethiopia. Marshal Badoglio

[56] Baer, esp. 105-106; 243.

managed Donovan's access so that he left with the impression that any American effort to help the Ethiopians would be futile.[57]

Following the use of chemical weapons, Italy also distributed disinformation to undermine external public reaction. Italy's response included denials that any such weapons were used and claims of legitimate reprisal against the Ethiopian use of dumdum bullets.[58] To propagate messages like this, Italy sent to Ethiopia Italian writers and foreign correspondents who were in sympathy with the fascist government.[59] Italy both realized the potential harm that foreign support and intervention could have and took measures to prevent it. Although Italy's actions could not erase the popular support that Ethiopia received, especially in Britain and America, they slowed and limited the responses of the political elites in those countries and others.

## C. CONCLUSION

From 1935 and into 1936, Emperor Haile Selassie and Ethiopia attempted to fight Italy with a partially asymmetric strategy, as shown in Figure 3. In the face of Italy's asymmetric technology and weapons, Selassie used an abstract center of gravity, a moral appeal to gain foreign support to limit Italy's freedom of action within the international system, as the focus of his strategy. Wedded to this, however, was a more traditional sequential operational pattern which sought the annihilation of the invading forces.

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[57] Account contained in James Dunnigan and Albert Nofi, *Victory and Deceit* (New York: Morrow, 1995), 154-6.

[58] Del Boca, 81-84.

[59] Ibid., 62-67.

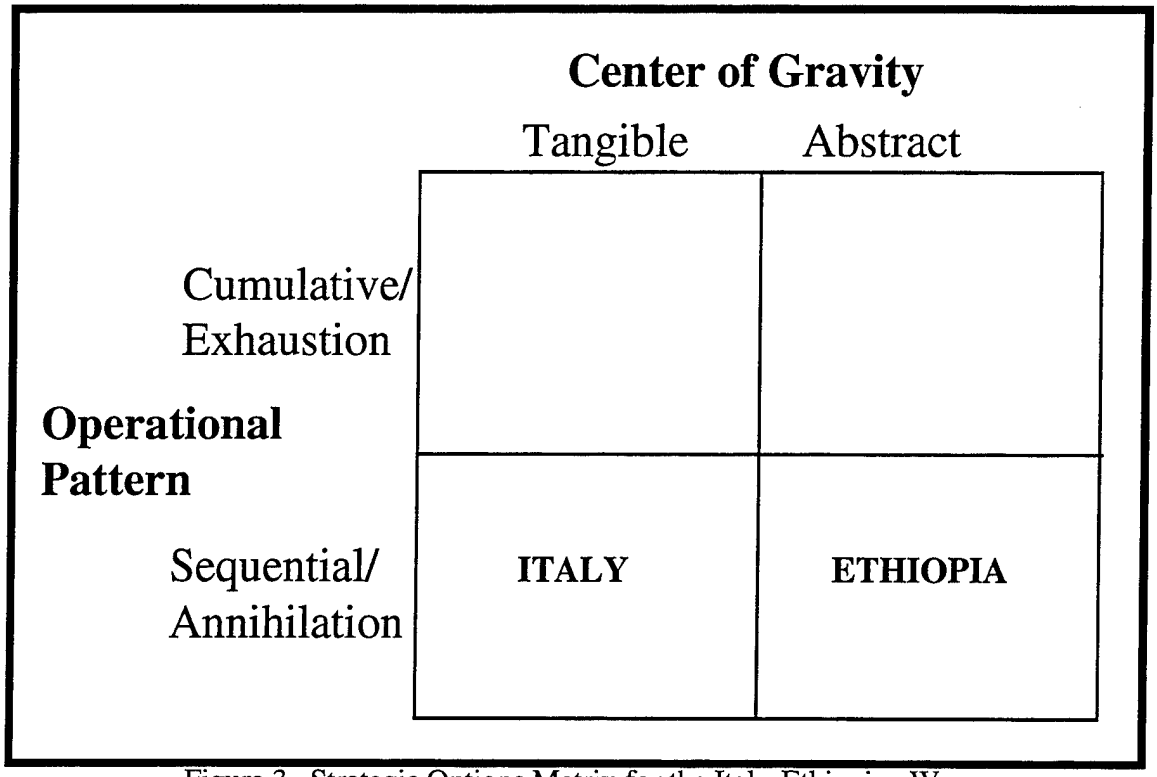


Figure 3. Strategic Options Matrix for the Italo-Ethiopian War

Ultimately, Selassie and Ethiopia suffered a massive defeat. The Italians overran the capital, inflicting hundreds of thousands of military and civilian casualties. This outcome was directly due to the four variables, none of which was weighted in Ethiopia's favor. The unskilled Ethiopian army could neither stop the Italian army, nor inflict heavy casualties on the invaders. Ethiopia's national will was not as solid as Italy's. Haile Selassie could not count on the support of all his people, even in the face of a foreign invasion; as a result, the Ethiopians lost around 200,000 possible soldiers and the Italians gained significant intelligence. External support, which was central to Ethiopia's strategy, consisted of only a handful of advisors, pilots, and doctors and no material to help counter Italy's technological advantage. Finally, Italy recognized the possibilities and dangers of Ethiopia's strategy and took actions to counter it. The critical factors were stacked against Ethiopia and the outcome of the war reflected this.

# IV. THE RUSSO-FINNISH WAR(1939-1940)

## A. THE CONFLICT

### 1. Background

The early history of Finland is the story of a small nation caught between two great empires. Two authors described Finland's situation as having been "a punching bag for her powerful neighbors; first Sweden, then Russia."[1] Before the nineteenth century, twelve major wars were fought between Finland's neighbors on her own soil. Finally, in 1809, Finland was ceded to Russia. Despite such a turbulent history, the fierce determination of the Finnish people preserved their cultural independence.

Finland gained special strategic significance for Russia in 1703 when Peter the Great selected the site for his new capital, St. Petersburg. The location of the city, which would later be known during the Soviet era as Leningrad, meant that Finland's Karelian Isthmus was a strategic offensive route into this important Russian city. Russia maintained its security by administering Finland as a Grand Duchy throughout the nineteenth century. Relations were generally harmonious until Czar Alexander III came to power in 1881. Increasing oppression through 1914 led many Finns to begin plotting, acting, and fighting for political independence. Finland got its wish in 1917 when Russia was engulfed in the chaos of Lenin's revolution.

Following its revolution, until the 1920s, the Soviet Union was too preoccupied with internal difficulties to allocate attention and resources to external strategic concerns. During this time, Finland also experienced a civil war in which a revolutionary uprising was crushed by military force. By 1938, Russia was again concerned with external issues such as a nascent right-wing movement in Finland and the military balance vis-à-vis

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[1] Quotation from Eloise Engle and Lauri Paananen, *The Winter War* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1973), xii. Historical information is drawn from their introduction and William Trotter, *A Frozen Hell* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1991), 3-22.

Germany.[2] To secure the approaches to Leningrad, Russia sought to "improve relations" with Finland. Diplomatic efforts towards this end failed, because the Finns were unwilling to cede islands in the Gulf of Finland and other territory requested by Russia.

In August 1939, the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement reduced Stalin's strategic concerns and allowed him to devote heavy-handed attention to Finland. To create a security buffer around Leningrad, Stalin demanded major adjustments to Finland's borders. Negotiations on this issue continued from the beginning of October until the ninth of November and failed to produce any results. Less than twenty days later, Russia invaded Finland.

### 2. Asymmetric Weapons and Technology

Finland went to war in 1939 with both qualitative (in terms of weapons) and quantitative disadvantages. While the disparity between the Soviet Union and Finland in terms of technology was not as pronounced as between Italy and Ethiopia, the quantitative difference was much greater. A nation of less than 4 million with an armed force of less than 300,000 was standing up to a nation of around 190 million who initially would send forward about a half million fighting men.[3] The Russian force would be further increased in size as the prospect of a quick victory disappeared.

In terms of small arms, the Finns and the Russians were at a rough parity. In the other weapons of land warfare, the Finns were disadvantaged. Most of Finland's artillery dated from World War I; cannon like these were in short supply, so antique weapons from the late 1800's were pressed into service.[4] The Finnish armored force of less than fifty obsolete vehicles was irrelevant in the face of 3,300 Soviet tanks. Also troubling for

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[2] The Lapuan Movement was generally small and incompetent, but it managed to kidnap Finland's retired first president in 1931 and attempt a coup in 1932. See Trotter, 8-9.

[3] Yohanan Cohen, *Small Nations in Times of Crisis and Confrontation*, trans. Naftali Greenwood (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1989), 263-4, 319.

[4] Allan Chew, *The White Death* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1971), 23.

Finland was the lack of antitank weapons. The army received its first antitank guns only a few weeks before the beginning of the war. Only one hundred were received in this first shipment from Sweden. Finland's initial encounters with modern armored forces would be traumatic as a result.[5]

On land, Finland had a few advantages. Simple fortifications and skiing ability, not technology, would serve as combat multipliers for the Finnish Army. In the south, Finland had erected a series of defensive fortifications known as the Mannerheim Line. Despite later Soviet claims that the Mannerheim Line was "created according to the latest word in equipment," it was much less than a modern defensive position like the Maginot Line in France.[6] Finland's defenses were comprised of about 109 strong points and associated obstacles over seventy kilometers; they lacked the weapons, depth, and complexity of the French fortifications.[7]

Finland's other advantage was the skiing ability of its troops. Almost every Finnish soldier was a cross-country skier.[8] This national skill gave the Finns an advantage in tactical mobility, despite the mechanization of their opponents. Soviet troops with little or no skiing ability were limited to plodding on foot through the thick woods or traveling in vehicles along narrow roads. Meanwhile, the Finns could travel quickly through the forests, attack the Soviets unexpectedly, and withdraw into the woods, preventing any pursuit.

The situation in the air was more symmetric in terms of technology. But the vast numerical superiority of the Russians created an asymmetry in the primary mission of each air force. Russia's aircraft would be used for offensive purposes, while Finnish planes

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[5] On land force asymmetries, see Chew, 19, 23-4; Cohen, 264-5; Trotter, 43-47.

[6] "Excerpts on Soviet 1938-40 Operations from *The History of Warfare, Military Art, and Military Science*, a 1977 Textbook of the Military Academy of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 6, no.1 (March 1993): 124.

[7] Trotter, chap. 6, 62-66.

[8] Chew, 27-28.

were primarily relegated to the defense. Russia would initially field about 800 aircraft against roughly 160 Finnish planes. Finland also possessed effective antiaircraft artillery.[9] Of the Finnish aircraft, about fifty were of sufficiently modern design to directly challenge the Russians in the air.[10] The remainder were less modern, including some open cockpit biplanes which were pressed into reconnaissance duties. Yet, because of the numerical balance, the Finnish Air Force was essentially a defensive force. While the Soviet air force would fly numerous strategic bombing missions and provide constant tactical support to its ground troops, the Finns were rarely able to deliver bombs against enemy troops, airfields, or cities.

Asymmetries in three other areas were of mixed importance. On the sea, the naval balance was largely irrelevant. By late December, the Gulf of Finland began to freeze over; encounters prior to this were generally ship-to-shore gunnery duels with little strategic effect.[11] In $C^3I$, the Finns lacked tactical radio communications below the regimental level.[12] Wire communications proved to be a highly vulnerable substitute, but the nature of Finnish tactical doctrine meant that this was not a critical problem. Small Finnish units were trained to take the initiative and fight in the absence of communications with higher headquarters. Finally, logistically the Soviet Union had a great advantage. Unlike Finland, the Russians had both a large armament industry and massive stockpiles of ammunition, fuel, and other consumables. At the beginning of the war, Finland had only a twenty day supply of artillery shells and a month's worth of aviation fuel.[13]

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[9] Trotter, 192.

[10] On the air power balance, see Engle and Paananen, chap. 8, 56-62; H.M. Tillotson, *Finland at Peace and War* (Norwich, U.K.: Michael Russell, 1993), 154; and Trotter, chap. 15, 187-193.

[11] Trotter, 54-57.

[12] Chew, 23.

[13] Trotter, 43.

While Finland was not as technologically disadvantaged as the Ethiopians, she did labor under some serious asymmetries. Most notable were the near total lack of counters to a modern mechanized ground force of the type that had recently proven itself in Poland and Manchuria, the inability of the air force to provide consistent tactical support or conduct strategic bombing, and a short supply of munitions and fuel along with an associated dependence on external supplies.

### 3. Asymmetric Strategy

Russia attacked Finland with a traditional great power strategy. The massed armored might of the Red Army was to cross the border and seize the entire country. The Russians, in shifting from diplomacy to war, had also shifted their war aims. They intended to quickly conquer all of Finland and convert it "into an obedient satellite."[14]

As the war began, Finnish strategy was in the hands of one man, Marshal Carl Gustav Mannerheim, the Chairman of the Defense Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Mannerheim, a man of impressive experience and intelligence, had earlier recommended that Finland accede to Russia's diplomatic demands for territory.[15] Mannerheim had correctly calculated that Finland's refusal would not end Russian efforts to obtain the land. Yet, even after his advice was tragically ignored, Mannerheim stepped forward to wage a brilliant military campaign.

Mannerheim fought the Russians with a partially asymmetric strategy which was the reverse of the Ethiopians. While the Ethiopians had focused on an abstract center of gravity, hoping to gain foreign intervention to constrain the Italians, Mannerheim and Finland would directly attack the military forces of the Soviet Union. Unlike the Ethiopians, however, Mannerheim would not risk all in a sequential campaign of decisive

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[14] Max Jacobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 167-8.

[15] Mannerheim's career included service as a cavalry officer in the Imperial Russian army and leadership of the victorious White Finnish forces during the civil war. See Oliver Warner, *Marshal Mannerheim and the Finns* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967).

battles between large formations. Finland would attack the Soviet military with a cumulative strategy of many small unit actions.

By 1939, the Finns realized that external support from either the League of Nations, Germany, or America was an unlikely proposition. Britain and France, the League's leadership, had proven impotent in earlier crises and were now involved in the Phony War with Germany. Germany, a potential ally of Finland, had signed a non-aggression pact with Russia and was not yet ready to break with its partner in the east. America was still working to keep itself out of European troubles. While external support was diplomatically sought and used as a tool for negotiations with the Russians, it was not the focus of Finland's strategy.

Instead, the Finns devoted their efforts into attacking the most tangible center of gravity possible: the Russian army now inside their borders. To do this, Finland used a cumulative approach of small unit attacks against the ponderous Russian formations. Only once during the war would Finland attempt a sequential-type counterattack using divisions.[16] All of its other actions would be small bands of soldiers raiding on skis or fighting from isolated strongpoints along various defensive lines.

**4. The Course of the War and its Outcome:**

Bombs began to fall on Helsinki on November 30, 1939. The Soviet Union launched an offensive of unexpected size and intensity along almost the entire front of the border.[17] In the far north, a force of two divisions moved to seize the port of Petsamo on the Arctic Sea. In central Finland, five divisions attacked to divide the country at its narrow 'waist.' The Soviet main effort, however, was in the south. On the north and south sides of Lake Ladoga, large forces, each over seven divisions in strength, attacked to seize the Karelian Isthmus and open up the road to Helsinki.

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[16] Chew, 65-69.

[17] Prior to the invasion, the Finns estimated the Soviets would only be able to field thirteen divisions along the border. Their actual invasion day force was over twenty-one divisions. See Chew, 6; Trotter, 43.

The Russians had expected to achieve rapid success along the entire front with their material preponderance and massive firepower. In the first phase of the war, however, they would only secure Petsamo in the far north. After recovering from the initial shock of the invasion, the Finns put up a determined resistance. The Finns were helped by weather conditions described as "one of the most brutal the northland had ever seen since meteorological records started being kept in 1828."[18] Finnish forces used an active defense of company and battalion-sized raids and ambushes against vulnerable Russian flanks and supply lines. The cumulative effect of these small-scale attacks divided the heavy, road-bound Russian divisions into smaller subunits and isolated them from supplies and reinforcements.[19] Having reduced the Red Army's formations to pieces of a more manageable size and strength, the Finnish Army then massed the necessary firepower to rout or destroy the demoralized Russians. By December 23, Russian forces on the north side of Lake Ladoga were defeated and driven back to the border. By January 8, 1940, the two lead divisions in central Finland were annihilated.

At this point, there was a relative lull in the fighting. In the face of such overwhelming setbacks, the Russians took the time to reinforce and reorganize their forces. They resumed the offensive in the beginning of February. Instead of attempting to take all of Finland, the Soviets attacked with twenty-three divisions in the area of Lake Ladoga and the Karelian Isthmus. By February 11, they had breached the Mannerheim Line. Against the now coordinated Red armor and artillery, Finnish forces could not find vulnerabilities to attack. They continued, however, to offer fierce resistance and withdrew in good order. By March 1, the Soviets encircled the key town of Viipuri on the western end of the Karelian Isthmus.

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[18] Trotter, 145.

[19] These operations were described in the Western press of the time as *Motti* tactics, a deliberate Finnish innovation. More recent scholarship has shown that the *motti* term was little more than a descriptive term added after the fact to describe the rational tactics of a infantry force against a road bound armor force in close terrain. See Tillotson, 141; Trotter, 130-33.

At this point, Mannerheim realized that Finland must sue for peace. The new Soviet offensive was rapidly depleting Finnish resources. The vague promises of British and French intervention were unlikely to be fulfilled in time, or at all. Unlike his generals, Mannerheim believed that the fighting must be ended as soon as possible.[20] Observing that a full-scale collapse would result in Soviet occupation, Mannerheim pushed the civilian leadership to accept terms quickly. The Finns had earlier begun tentative negotiations for peace in January. On March 13, 1940 a peace treaty was signed. Finland lost much more land than Stalin had demanded in 1939, about 25,000 square miles of territory, including the entire Karelian Isthmus. In return, the Soviet Union had forsaken the goal of total victory and Finland maintained its independence.

Both sides paid a heavy human and material price. In this short war of less than four months, Finland lost about 25,000 soldiers killed and 44,000 wounded. At least 2,000 Finnish buildings had been destroyed by air attack alone.[21] On the Russian side, official figures put their losses at 49,000 dead and 159,000 wounded, but it is likely that the actual numbers were much higher.[22] The Soviet Union also lost at least 500 aircraft and 2,300 armored vehicles.[23]

Following the war, Finland would form a partnership, but not full alliance, with Germany. In support of Hitler's invasion of Russia, Finland would regain its lost territory. Finnish troops, however, would not take part in the siege of Leningrad or further incursions into Russia. With the coming of the Russian counter-offensive in 1944 and the

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[20] Warner, 157.

[21] Trotter, 188.

[22] Soviet figures cited from Trotter, 263. Trotter also mentions the estimates of Finnish historians: 230-270,000 killed and 200-300,000 wounded. Nikita Khrushchev is also cited as stating, "We lost a million men."

[23] Tillotson, Appendix 6, 20. Mannerheim estimated 1,000 Soviet aircraft were lost. See Engle and Paananen, 143.

Allied victory in 1945, Finland would again be reduced to its post-Winter War borders again, but would remain an independent country.

## B. HYPOTHESES APPLIED TO THE RUSSO-FINNISH WAR

### 1. Skilled Army

Relative to Russia, Finland managed to maintain a positive skill differential. Furthermore, the technologically inferior Finns demonstrated remarkable innovation in fighting the mechanized forces of the Red Army. The Russians, however, managed to narrow the skill gap by the war's end, allowing their quantitative advantages to become decisive.

The Red Army which entered Finland in 1939 was a force which had suffered from Russia's revolutionary change, and expected tanks and numbers to compensate for skill. Stalin's recent purges had eliminated eighty to ninety percent of officers with operational experience at the regimental level or higher.[24] The revolution had also ushered in a system of dual-command by military officers and political commissars which meant that sound tactical logic often received short shrift, even during the conduct of operations.[25] Finally, Russia's recent victories over the Japanese in Manchuria had given the military and political leaders a false sense of confidence. The Russian victory at Khalkin-Gol and the German *blitzkrieg* in Poland inflated the Red leadership's expectations of armored forces and undermined any consideration of the severe winter conditions they would face. The initial invasion forces carried propaganda materials instead of skis and winter camouflage.[26] While the individual Soviet soldier was usually courageous, in Finland he was initially led

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[24] Tillotson, 122.

[25] Trotter, 35.

[26] Ibid., 37.

by inexperienced officers who understood little about large unit operations or winter warfare.

Finland's army, despite its greater material limitations, had prepared itself well for the circumstances it would face. Realizing it could not field a mass armored force like the Soviets or other major European nations, Finland concentrating on training its soldiers in small-unit infantry skills. Building on the native skiing ability of most Finns, the army was prepared to fight under the most severe conditions possible. The Finnish foot soldier had trained on his home ground and developed good marksmanship, superior fieldcraft, and excellent small unit tactical proficiency. Their skills would earn them the nickname of *Belaya Smert* or "the White Death" from their poorly trained Russian opponents.[27]

The Finnish military leadership was also superior to the Soviet's. Finland had a cadre of men who had fought on their home soil during their own recent civil war and studied the specific military problems of winter warfare. One prominent example was Colonel Paavo Talvela, a reservist who had written his war college thesis about hypothetical tactics and operations in the terrain on which he would later fight.[28] After reporting for duty and requesting a command from Mannerheim, Talvela went on to stabilize the front north of Lake Ladoga, push the Russians back, and win a battlefield promotion to Major General. While Talvela's story is especially notable, the Finns had similar leadership throughout all levels of command.

While facing the Soviets, the Finns innovated to compensate for their lack of armor and antitank weapons. The presence and firepower of Red armor shocked Finnish troops for the first week or so of fighting.[29] The Finns, however, responded with mines, satchel

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[27] Ibid., chap. 12, 143-149.

[28] Engle and Paananen, 89.

[29] Chew, 19.

charges, and the "Molotov cocktail."[30] These weapons required highly motivated infantry of which the Finns had no shortage. In a five-day period on the Karelian Isthmus, Finnish infantry managed to destroy eighty Soviet tanks.[31]

The superior tactical skill of its infantry and the innovation of its people served Finland strategically. Because of its pre-war training, the Finnish army was built on confident, skilled small units which could execute the necessary tasks to support a cumulative strategy. Unlike the Soviets who were dependent on the synchronized use of massed armor and artillery, small Finnish units could maneuver on skis to ambush or raid the enemy's weak points. And these units possessed skilled leaders who could operate on their own initiative without the constant control or support of a higher headquarters. The cumulative effect of these small attacks was more than exhaustion in many cases; entire Soviet divisions were annihilated in the early phase of the war.

By February, however, the Soviets had regrouped and retrained their forces. They quickly placed experienced officers in control of the operation.[32] The new leaders put their troops through successive rehearsals to improve the coordination of their arms.[33] New techniques such as ski detachments on the flanks of large units were used to reduce vulnerabilities.[34] While this training did not bring Soviet skills up to the level of the Finns, it reduced the exploitable weaknesses which led to the annihilation of many units early in the war.[35] During the February offensive, Finnish troops would continue to maintain a

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[30] The gasoline-filled bottle bomb was apparently invented earlier during the Spanish Civil War, but it received its nickname in Finland. The Finns quickly produced the weapons, using 40,000 bottles from the State Liquor Board. See Trotter, 72-3; Engle and Paananen, chap. 5, 37-42.

[31] Engle and Paananen, 39.

[32] Chew, 77.

[33] Ibid., 141-2.

[34] A list of new techniques implemented is contained in the Main Command Directive of 28 December 1939, discussed in "Excerpts..."(fn.6), 131-2.

[35] Chew, 146-7.

positive exchange ratio of casualties, but it was reduced by an order of magnitude from what it had been. Instead of being routed or destroyed, the Soviets were now able to seize terrain and steadily push the Finns out of their prepared defensive positions. Most importantly, the limited Finnish supply of manpower and material was nearing the breaking point. The Soviets had finally raised their skill to a level where their superior numbers mattered.

### 2. National Will

The Soviet leadership had expected that there would be a relative differential of national willpower in their favor. With a brutal internal security system and a monolithic propaganda apparatus, the Soviet Union was firmly under Stalin's control. No organized dissent to the war would erupt in Russia.[36] Stalin, however, perceived Finland as a nation with a suppressed class struggle. Once the Red Army crossed the border, the Finns were expected to become mired in internal conflict. But Stalin had been fed overly optimistic assessments of internal Finnish politics, largely because his advisors feared bringing him bad news.[37] His hopes for a second Finnish revolution would remain unrealized.

The Soviet invasion actually strengthened Finnish national will. Finnish communists, on the whole, chose to support their country instead of Stalin. Arvo Tuominen, the most respected Finnish communist, declined Stalin's request to form a new government.[38] The Soviets were able to recruit less than 6,000 Finns to form a "People's Army of Finland" which saw almost no action.[39] On the other hand, many veterans of the

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[36] Foreign diplomats reported that the war was widely unpopular among Soviet civilians. See Jacobson, 217. Of course, this was based on a survey of individual attitudes, not the presence of organized demonstrations. In the Red Army, morale actually improved during the war as the battle cry changed from "For Stalin" to "For the Fatherland" after the initial defeats. See Trotter, 205.

[37] Trotter, 18-19.

[38] Ibid., 59-60.

[39] Chew, 79; Jacobson, 170.

Finnish Red Guards from the 1918 civil war volunteered either to fight for their Fatherland or serve in civil defense organizations.[40]

The Finnish nation as a whole responded unhesitatingly to the call for mobilization prior to the Soviet invasion. In a period of less than two months, the entire regular and reserve army had been mobilized and civil defense organizations were fully activated. About 100,000 men reported for the Civic Guards militia and 100,000 Finnish women for the Lotta Svard auxiliary which provided nurses, clerks, and other support personnel.[41] Finnish nationalism included a fierce contempt for Russians which overrode any considerations of class.[42] The nation as a whole fully embraced the war effort and would continue to do so until the end.

### 3. External Support

Finland received a higher degree of external support than Ethiopia had in its war. Moral and material assistance, along with a few volunteers, came from around the globe. This support helped compensate for Finland's lack of an armament industry and its prewar logistical constraints, but it could not replace the manpower lost in battle. Two other forms of external aid, moral support and the threat of foreign intervention, had little effect.

The history of the war by Eloise Engle and Lauri Paananen contains the best accounting of external support.[43] At least eleven countries, including America, Britain, and Italy, made significant material donations to the Finns. These donations included over 280 artillery pieces, 290 antitank guns, 460 antiaircraft guns, 150 aircraft and significant

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[40] Chew, 24.

[41] Ibid., 26-7.

[42] One common Finnish saying was "One Finn is equal to ten Russians." See Jacobson, 172-3; Trotter, 40.

[43] Engle and Paananen, Appendix B, 153-157. Cohen, chap. 17, 277-88, also provides a through review of foreign support.

ammunition stocks.[44] Of less importance, over 10,000 foreign volunteers joined the Finnish side.[45] These volunteers were usually poorly organized in small units with little or no preparation for fighting under winter conditions.[46]

The remaining external support received by the Finns was relatively insignificant in terms of the war's outcome. Moral support in the form of popular expressions of sympathy were heard throughout the world.[47] The League of Nations expelled the Soviet Union.[48] While these actions reinforced Finnish national morale, they did not improve Finland's long-term prospects for resisting the Red Army.

The final type of external support received by Finland were the threats by Britain and France to send a large expeditionary force to Finland.[49] The impact of this possible intervention, however, should not be overstated. By January, the initial Soviet estimates of the time and cost of the war had been proven wrong and tentative peace negotiations had begun. The Finnish military strategy had forced the Soviets to reconsider their simple cost-benefit analysis. The additional military costs to occupy the entire country would not be worth the benefit of total occupation, which was not one the goals of the Soviet's prewar diplomatic effort. When the possibility of Allied intervention gained strength in late February, it still was hampered by poor Allied planning, a very uncertain commitment to

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[44] It should be noted than at least 50% of this equipment was obsolete by the standards of the day. Post-war Soviet accounts exaggerated the size and quality of external support to provide a partial explanation of the poor performance of the Red Army. See Cohen, 279; "Excerpts...", 127.

[45] The small number of volunteer pilots made some important contributions. In one case, a group of Swedish pilots flying obsolete biplanes managed to shoot down six Russian bombers. See Trotter, 190-1.

[46] Mannerheim estimated he needed at least 30,000 trained fighting men to stabilize the front. See Cohen, 279. The poor quality of the volunteers of Kermit Roosevelt's "Finnish Legion" is especially notable. See Trotter, 194-5.

[47] Jacobson, 176-7.

[48] Ibid., 178-80.

[49] For a concise account of Allied bungling, see Jacobson, 197-253. Douglas Clark, *Three Days to Catastrophe* (London: Hammond, Hammond & Company, 1966), is a full volume on the topic.

the operation, and Norwegian and Swedish reluctance to provide transit rights.[50] That the Soviets considered the possibility of Allied intervention in moving towards a settlement is almost certain; that its prospects changed the outcome or made it possible is much less likely. At no time did the Soviets moderate their offensive to avoid provocation to the West, nor did they reduce their demands on the Finns to achieve a faster settlement. At most, the prospect of intervention only confirmed what was already clear on the battlefield; for the Soviets, the aim of taking all of Finland would not be worth the cost.

### 4. Opponent's Counter Strategy

Although the Soviets took some actions to undermine Finland's strategy, it is clear that they underestimated the Finns' will and capability to resist. Years after the war, Nikita Khrushchev reminisced that they had assumed that "all we had to do was raise our voices a little bit, and the Finns would obey. If that didn't work, we could fire one shot and the Finns would put up their hands and surrender."[51] Soviet estimates of the time needed to complete the campaign ran from five to twelve days.[52] Extensive preparations by a great nation were rejected as unnecessary for the defeat of such a small country.[53]

The assumption that Soviet military might would quickly prevail was also combined with the assumption that a class-based revolution would erupt in Finland. As discussed earlier, Soviet actions to propagate such an event backfired. But because the Soviet strategy rested on these two optimistic assumptions, there was no attempt to counter a possible asymmetric strategy by the Finns. Early belligerent moves gave the Finns the time for full mobilization.[54] As a result, the Finnish Army was almost fully prepared to execute its cumulative strategy. The Russians had given no thought to preventing an early

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[50] Jacobson, 218-9.

[51] As quoted in Trotter, 21.

[52] Chew, 20-1.

[53] Stalin rejected the advice of Shaposhnikov, Chief of the General Staff, on such grounds. See Chew, 2-3.

mobilization or defeating possible Finnish asymmetric strategies. As a result, the Soviet Union would pay a high price in men and equipment in the war.

## C. CONCLUSION

In 1939-40, Marshal Mannerheim and Finland used a partially asymmetric strategy to resist the Soviet invasion, as shown by Figure 4. With a predominantly infantry army, Finland attempted to fight and defeat the larger Soviet mechanized and air forces. Finland, choosing a traditional center of gravity, matched its military directly against the Soviets. The Finns, however, used a cumulative operational pattern which achieved more than just the exhaustion of the enemy in the early stages of the war(see Figure 4).

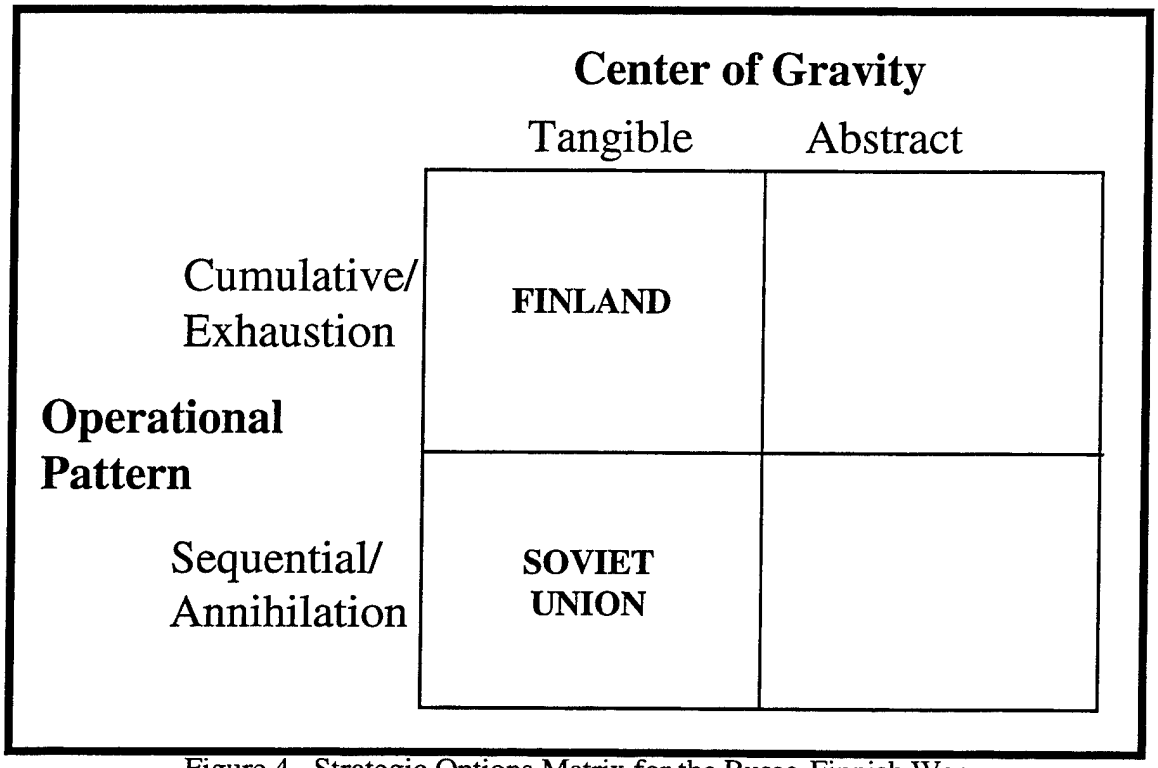


Figure 4. Strategic Options Matrix for the Russo-Finnish War

Finland's strategy, however, in the end did not bring about victory. While the Soviet Union did not occupy Finland, it gained more territory than it had originally

[54] Chew, 26.

demanded. Finland's continued independence came at the price of some of its most significant lands. In this respect, the war for Finland was a partial defeat.

Finland lost less badly than Ethiopia had in its war against the Italians of a few years earlier. Much of the differences in the success of the two countries was due to the differences in the four variables between the two countries. The superior skill of the Finnish Army allowed them consistently to inflict more casualties on the Soviets than they suffered themselves. While Ethiopia lost 200,000 or more men due to ethnic-based fissures in its national willpower, Finland lost 6,000 or less due to communist propaganda. In external support, Finland received significant quantities of material which helped their army continue to fight. Finally, the Soviet Union, unlike the Italians, underestimated their opponents and failed to consider what possible actions their weaker enemy might attempt. Finland fared better than Ethiopia, but the critical factors were still not all fully in its favor.

# V. THE UNITED STATES IN VIETNAM(1965-1973)

## A. THE CONFLICT

### 1. Background

War against foreign domination has been a feature of the Vietnamese nationalist myth for hundreds of years.[1] The wars in Indochina following World War II are now part of that myth. Their scope, complexity, and duration greatly exceed that of the two wars considered earlier. The purpose of this case study, however, is not to review every part of the Indochina wars; instead, the focus will be on the North Vietnamese war to end direct American involvement in South Vietnam.[2]

Whether the main threat to South Vietnam was a conventional North Vietnamese enemy or a Viet Cong guerrilla army is still a highly contested proposition. Most American commentators see Harry Summers' *On Strategy* and Andrew Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam* as representing the two poles of the issue.[3] Both authors admit, however, to the presence of both types of combatants in the conflict. Overseas, despite wartime claims that North Vietnam was merely supporting an internal insurgency in South Vietnam, current

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[1] As one Vietnamese text puts it, "Through the millennia of their history, the Vietnamese have often had to defend themselves against aggression coming from states far more powerful than themselves." This book documents battles from 1077 to 1789 to prove this point. See the forward to Pham Huy Le, *Our Military Traditions* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1978(?)). Based on the author's personal experience, a tour of the history and military museums in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City makes this attitude very clear.

[2] The wars of Indochina include the Viet Minh war against the French; a communist insurgency in South Vietnam; the American-North Vietnamese War; the North Vietnamese War against South Vietnam; wars in Laos and Cambodia; and a Chinese border war with Vietnam in 1979. Background history for this section comes from Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam* (New York: Penguin, 1983); Robert Schulzinger, *A Time for War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Harry Summers, *Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995).

[3] Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Harry Summers, *On Strategy* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1981).

Vietnamese historians claim that the war was always controlled and supported from the North.[4] While the author recognizes that guerrilla tactics were used and some South Vietnamese peasants were recruited into the struggle, this case will present the war as a conventional conflict in the sense that it was strategically directed and supported by a nation-state, North Vietnam.[5]

Before World War II, Vietnam was a French colony. The Viet Minh, a nationalist movement (with communist overtones) which fought the Japanese and received U.S. support, had hoped for independence following W.W.II. Their dreams went unrealized with the return of the French in 1945. The Viet Minh movement then turned to violent action. Building an army with support from Chinese, they waged war from 1946 to 1954. The Viet Minh turned France's sequential strategy back on them, destroying a large force of their most elite troops at Dien Bien Phu. As a result, France lost its empire in Southeast Asia. At the Geneva Conference in 1954, a settlement was reached which called for the partition of the country into a communist north under Ho Chi Minh, a more traditional government in the south, and an eventual referendum to resolve the question of which system would rule a united country.

The referendum was never held. By 1957, the Soviet Union proposed that North and South Vietnam be admitted to the United Nations as separate countries. Ngo Dinh Diem, the democratically elected President of South Vietnam, managed to defeat an armed non-communist resistance and the remnants of the Viet Minh in the south and establish control over most of his country. Seeing that internal disarray would not bring the south to its knees, North Vietnam decided to initiate a war against Diem's government.

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[4] See Douglas Pike, *PAVN* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1986), 47-50.

[5] The author feels the evidence clearly shows that North Vietnam used and directly controlled the Viet Cong as one part of an overall strategy. Furthermore, it seems extremely doubtful that the Viet Cong insurgency could have achieved equivalent success without North Vietnamese forces, strategic direction, or logistic support.

In 1959, North Vietnam established the Central Office in South Vietnam (COSVN) to control the war effort. Four thousand Viet Minh veterans who had moved north after the 1954 partition were sent south to become the core of the Viet Cong.[6] At the time, North Vietnam took care to hide its involvement. As Douglas Pike found, the story now has changed; "Only now do Hanoi historians corroborate the fact that there was deep [North Vietnamese Army] command and control in the South from the earliest days, as well as systematic logistic support during the war."[7] A military study team was dispatched from North Vietnam in 1963 to examine the question of committing regular forces to the fight.[8] By the end of 1964, complete NVA tactical units were entering the Central Highlands of South Vietnam.[9]

U.S. involvement followed a less deliberate track. Following the departure of the French, the U.S. began to support "nation-building" in South Vietnam. By 1961, there were 900 U.S. military advisors in country. By 1963, at the time of President Kennedy's death, there were 16,300. American casualties went from 14 in 1961 to nearly 500 in 1963.[10] America also supported South Vietnamese clandestine operations to gather intelligence on North Vietnam and disrupt their maritime resupply efforts to the Viet Cong in the south.[11] U.S. naval vessels were allegedly fired on by North Vietnamese gunboats attempting to repel these operations, resulting in the Gulf of Tonkin Congressional

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[6] Summers, *Atlas*, 70.

[7] Pike, 47.

[8] Karnow, 331-334.

[9] This was a North Vietnamese attempt to finish the war because the Viet Cong had failed to produce decisive results. "In the autumn of 1964, General Giap committed two divisions of the regular North Vietnamese Army with the expectation that they would deliver the *coup de grace* in 1965." Allan Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 548.

[10] Millett and Maslowski, 546.

[11] These operations had begun as early as 1954. See Karnow, 363-4.

Resolution, a quasi-resolution of war. As Stanley Karnow noted, the resolution was conceived to give President Johnson wide strategic authority:

> His aides broadened the draft of the proposed congressional resolution so that it now authorized him to "take all necessary measures" to repel attacks against U.S. forces and to "prevent further aggression" as well as determine when "peace and security" in the area had been attained.[12]

US ground forces were first committed in March of 1965. Although originally dispatched as airfield security, their mission expanded in April when they were authorized to conduct offensive operations. In 1965, U.S. strength in South Vietnam would jump from 23,300 to 184,300. The U.S. role shifted from advise and support to direct combat.

### 2. Asymmetric Weapons and Technology

In Vietnam, the asymmetries between combatants were in their overall systems and not only in individual platforms. American forces developed systems which leveraged technology to provide prodigious amounts of firepower, mobility, and intelligence. The North Vietnamese, on the other hand, were generally limited to fighting with weapons which had been around since the conclusion of World War II.

One American historian and former air force officer claims that Vietnam was "the country that...suffered more bombardment than all others put together, in all previous wars."[13] America possessed a number of significant platforms which fed into a system that could deliver massive firepower to any part of Vietnam; these included jet fighter-bombers, B-52 strategic bombers, propeller-driven gunships, attack helicopters, large-caliber artillery, and battleships.[14] Although North Vietnam used some cannon artillery in battles

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[12] Ibid., 374.

[13] James P. Harrison, "History's Heaviest Bombing," in *The Vietnam War*, ed. by Jane Werner and Luu Doan Huynh (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 130.

[14] For an overview of the American firepower system, see Robert Scales, *Firepower in Limited War* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995), 82-103,124.

near the demilitarized zone (DMZ), it had no comparable system to deliver massed firepower the way the Americans could to any location.[15]

Only on their home soil could North Vietnam field a counter to American firepower. As Stanley Karnow recounts, with the support of the Soviet Union,

> the North Vietnamese developed one of the strongest air defense concentrations in the world, comprising eight thousand antiaircraft guns, more than two hundred surface-to-air missile[SAM] batteries, a complex radar system, and computerized control centers.[16]

In addition, the North Vietnamese possessed a number of MIG aircraft which they used for air defense north of the DMZ. These aircraft, which after 1967 grew in number to around two hundred, were always quantitatively overwhelmed by the two thousand or so aircraft that American and her allies could field.[17] Furthermore, North Vietnamese forces south of the DMZ were outside the MIG or SAM umbrella; they could only count on small arms or light cannon for air defense.

In terms of mobility, while the North Vietnamese usually moved on foot, American soldiers could rely on helicopters or armored vehicles. The war was the first use of helicopters on a large scale for air mobility, fire support, medical evacuation and logistic resupply of ground troops.[18] North Vietnam never had an equivalent capability. The United States and its allies would also use mechanized forces in battalion strength or larger. North Vietnam would not field comparable forces until late in the war during the 1972 offensive.[19]

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[15] Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 110.

[16] Karnow, 457.

[17] Harrison, 136.

[18] Shelby Stanton, *The Rise and Fall of an American Army* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1985), 91-95.

[19] The NVA did use a few tanks in two attacks against U.S. base camps in 1968-9. See Lanning and Cragg, 121.

In terms of $C^3I$, America developed many capabilities the North Vietnamese could not replicate. Not all of America's high technology, however, would prove to be effective. Remote electronic sensing and detection devices of various design were used by the United States.[20] American forces were also fitted with early night-vision technology. An American infantry company could communicate on multiple radio nets simultaneously, linking it the vast firepower system that supported them. The equivalent North Vietnamese force had only one radio and usually poor supporting fires.[21] Overall, American communications provided their ground troops with a direct link to their supporting firepower system while their advanced electronic sensors worked with less reliability and did not lift the fog of war. The United States would discover that its technology and forces were not equally effective in all parts of the world. The varied terrain in Indochina, which included swamps, triple-canopy jungle, and rugged hills and small mountains, would often degrade the capabilities of America's technology-based systems.

Although North Vietnam received some weapons from China and the Soviet Union which were as technologically sophisticated as their American counterparts, they would never have an interlocking system of technology that provided great quantities of firepower, mobility, and intelligence. North Vietnam was an agricultural society that rapidly learned to use a few of the modern implements of war. America was a technologically advanced society which would deliver around fifteen million tons of ordnance over seven years, develop a variety of electronic sensors, and experiment with tons of herbicides to change the battlefield environment.[22]

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[20] For an brief overview of the U.S. sensor network, see Herman Gilster, *The Air War in Southeast Asia* (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 1993), 18-19; and Paddy Griffith, *Forward into Battle*, (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1990), 143-44.

[21] See Lanning and Cragg, 111; and Ronald Spector, "How Do You Know If You're Winning?": Perception and Reality in America's Military Performance in Vietnam, 1965-1970" in *The Vietnam War* (fn.13), 156.

[22] Data from Harrison, 131.

### 3. Asymmetric Strategy

The United States attempted a number of strategies during the Vietnam war. The initial strategy attempted was one on graduated pressure which primarily relied on aerial attacks against North Vietnamese targets. This was a cumulative strategy against an abstract center of gravity: "the aim of force was not to impose one's will on the enemy but to communicate with him."[23] The goal of military action was to "convey American resolve and thereby convince an adversary to alter his behavior."[24] This plan was rapidly proven ineffective because North Vietnam was willing to bear more costs than the U.S. was willing to inflict.[25] This approach to the conflict which sought to minimize U.S. involvement instead created an open-ended American commitment to South Vietnam.[26]

The failure of this strategy to produce rapid low cost results meant a return to a more traditional American strategy, a sequential campaign to destroy enemy forces. This strategy did not stand alone; cumulative aerial bombing and maritime campaigns to interdict the flow of supplies to the South and a cumulative population control campaigns to end the insurgency supported the sequential campaign.[27] But the most visible strategy in Vietnam was General William Westmoreland's search-and-destroy operation conducted by

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[23] H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 62. This strategy which conceived military capabilities as a communications and bargaining tool was primarily based on the theories of Thomas Schelling. See Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

[24] Ibid.

[25] Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 174-210, fully presents this argument.

[26] See McMaster, 298.

[27] The air campaign was comprised of Rolling Thunder and the later Commando Hunt operations. Naval interdiction operations were under the Market Time naval interdiction program and Operation Sealord. Population control campaigns included the small Marine Combined Action Platoon(CAP) program and the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support(CORDS) operation of which the Phoenix program was a major part. See Gilster, 18-21; and Summers, *Atlas*, 96, 100, 124, 148, 150.

large US units. Russell Weigley described this strategy as:

> aimed at denying the enemy freedom of movement not just in selected areas but throughout South Vietnam, at carrying the war to the enemy, and at winning victory by the means sanctioned by the most deeply rooted historical American conceptions of strategy, the destruction of the enemy's armed forces and of his ability to wage war.[28]

It must be noted, however, that the strategic goal of Westmoreland's large unit sequential strategy was not the annihilation of the entire enemy army, but merely its attrition to a level where the enemy would quit the contest. Political considerations such as a ban on overt operations in North Vietnamese base areas in Laos and Cambodia and the goal of achieving a negotiated settlement prevented Westmoreland from fully adopting a strategy of annihilation.[29]

To drive the Americans out of the South, the North Vietnamese found it necessary to develop a strategy to fit the circumstances of the conflict instead of trying to fit the conflict to a strategy. To defeat the Americans, Giap based his strategy on the approach he used in fighting the earlier war against the French. He recognized that a sequential pattern to achieve victory was unlikely to work against a more powerful foe:

> We had to deal with an enemy much stronger than us. It was patent that this balance of forces took away from us the possibility of giving decisive battles from the opening of the hostilities and of checking the aggression from the first enemy landing on our soil. In a word, it was impossible to for us to win a quick victory.[30]

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[28] Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 464-5.

[29] American strategy is Vietnam is difficult to typify. At the operational level, it relied on a series of sequential battles and campaigns to destroy enemy forces, but only in South Vietnam. Because of politically-required geographical limitations, for war-winning results it hoped to exhaust the North Vietnamese war effort. The dominant American strategy for the war, whether it was sequential or cumulative, was, as we shall see later, still asymmetric when compared to North Vietnam's. For in-depth analysis of Westmoreland's attrition strategy, see Phillip Davidson, *Vietnam at War* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1988), 348-357.

[30] Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army*, second edition (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1974), 54.

Instead, Giap would use a cumulative operational pattern. Individual battles and campaigns were not critical to the success of the conflict. As Stanley Karnow found, Giap and the North Vietnamese "viewed each engagement as a step in a series of encounters, winning some and losing some, until eventually the tide would turn in their favor."[31]

Wedded to this cumulative pattern was an abstract center of gravity, the psychological will of the United States to continue the conflict. An American scholar found that:

> their emphasis was not on a military defeat of the United States but, rather, on exhausting the strategic possibilities open to it. The key was to defeat the 'aggressive will' of the United States- a psychological objective more than a military one.[32]

The North Vietnamese themselves were less explicit than in recognizing their emphasis on such an abstract center of gravity.[33] As Giap said after the war, "For us, you know, there is no such thing as a single strategy. Ours is always a synthesis, simultaneously military, political, and diplomatic--which is why, quite clearly, the Tet Offensive had multiple objectives."[34] Whether Giap had deliberately designated American will as the one critical center of gravity, it is clear that is where the North's actions had effect; Lieutenant General Phillip Davidson would later describe the war as "a war waged in a critical, but

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[31] Karnow, 639.

[32] David Elliot, "Hanoi's Strategy in the Second Indochina War," in *The Vietnam War*(fn.13), 70.

[33] The [North] Vietnamese have been extremely reticent about releasing records of their wartime strategic thought. Most of the wartime and post-war writing by Giap and other military leaders was clearly for propaganda purposes. Even today, there has been little disclosure of internal information; during a 1997 joint American-Vietnamese conference in Hanoi, no new documents were released from Hanoi's archives, strict media controls were placed on the proceedings, and General Giap refused to answer Robert McNamara's questions. See David Shipler, "Robert McNamara and the Ghosts of Vietnam," *New York Times Magazine* (August 10, 1997), 30. A fascinating question outside the reach of this thesis is "What measures of effectiveness did North Vietnam's military strategists use during the war?"

[34] Karnow, 535.

indeterminate manner, in the uncharted depths of the American psyche and in the obscurity of our national soul."[35]

### 4. The Course of the War and its Outcome:

From 1965 to 1968, the war was "a combination of insurgency and conventional war."[36] The most significant early battles occurred in the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965.[37] One U.S. air cavalry battalion destroyed an NVA regiment, but another U.S. battalion was ambushed and badly mauled. Big unit operations continued in 1966. As Harry Summers recounts, claims of decisive results usually did not hold true; in one operation, "the 3rd NVA division was pronounced destroyed, but as was true of other 'destroyed' enemy units throughout the war, it soon rose again from the dead."[38] Over the next two years the Army would continue a series of large operations which had limited strategic effect on an enemy willing to absorb casualties. By 1967, the war was killing 800 Americans a month for little tangible gain except the public pronouncements of success by both the political and military leadership.[39]

Late in 1967, the North Vietnamese launched a series of border campaigns to distract U.S. attention away from South Vietnamese urban areas. These diversionary attacks were followed by a general countrywide offensive on the lunar New Year holiday of 1968. The Tet Offensive lasted three months and resulted in mortal wounds to the Viet Cong military forces. The chief intelligence officer for MACV during this time discovered

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[35] Davidson, 795. He also cites the claim that one objective of the North Vietnamese 1972 offensive was to spur antiwar protests in the U.S. See 676.

[36] Ibid., 357.

[37] These battles are best recounted by two participants, Hal Moore and Joseph Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young* (New York: Random House, 1992).

[38] Summers, *Atlas*, 110.

[39] Statistics from Millett and Maslowski, 554.

that "the Viet Cong guerrillas and the VC political infrastructure, the insurgency operators, were virtually destroyed in the Tet Offensive."[40]

While the effect on the North Vietnamese war effort was primarily physical, the damage to America was psychological. The massive offensive seemed to make a lie out of America's political and military pronouncements about progress in previous years. The credibility of the war effort with the American media seemed to evaporate. One of America's senior newscasters asked, "What the hell's going on here? I thought we were winning this war?"[41] President Johnson had been dealt a mortal psychological blow; Karnow would later write, "his credibility- the key to a president's capacity to govern- was gone."[42] On March 31, 1968 he announced his decision not to run for a second term. Henry Kissinger later wrote that when the Nixon administration came to power in 1969, "our credibility abroad, the reliability of our commitments, and our domestic cohesion were alike jeopardized...our country had been riven by protest and anguish."[43]

Following the Tet offensive, the North Vietnamese reverted to small cumulative attacks and ambushes combined with infrequent "high point" offensive operations by larger units.[44] During this period, Americans were being killed at a rate of 200 a week.[45] The North Vietnamese were maintaining the psychological pressure on America.

At the same time, North Vietnam used negotiations as part of their psychological strategy. The apparent North Vietnamese acceptance of talks or negotiations with America was used to gain American concessions such as a bombing halt. Yet, because North

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[40] Davidson, 357.

[41] Walter Cronkite, as cited in Schulzinger(fn.2), 262; see also Karnow, 547-8.

[42] Karnow, 546.

[43] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 226.

[44] Davidson, 358.

[45] Data as cited from Kissinger, 235, for second half of 1968.

Vietnam had no real interest in a negotiated agreement, this process produced nothing but breathing space for the North.[46]

Confronted with a turbulent domestic situation at home, President Richard Nixon introduced a new program to buy time to find a way out of the Vietnam quagmire. Nixon announced a program of American troop withdrawals and the process of "Vietnamization," turning the war effort exclusively over to the South Vietnamese. Instead of having the desired effect, however, this new program undermined any chance of mutual U.S. and North Vietnamese withdrawals from South Vietnam and did little to calm the harsh domestic situation. Hanoi viewed the program as a clear indication that America's will was broken; they continued to take every possible step to maintain the pressure and demand faster withdrawals.[47] On August 15, 1969, America's mission changed from an "ambitious intention to 'defeat' the enemy and 'force' its withdrawal to North Vietnam" to a focus "on providing 'maximum assistance' to the South Vietnamese to strengthen their forces, supporting pacification efforts, and reducing the flow of supplies to the enemy."[48]

The war would drag with direct American involvement for three more years. An American attempt to fight a sequential campaign in 1970 to cut off the North Vietnamese supply route through Cambodia was halted by increased domestic protests in the United States.[49] By 1972, almost all US ground forces had been withdrawn. Sensing the opportunity for decisive victory, the North Vietnamese in March launched the Easter Offensive with a conventional army of new tanks and artillery.[50] This offensive, which used almost every major unit in the NVA, presented great targets for Linebacker I, a U.S.

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[46] See Kissinger, 259-61, for comments on the North Vietnamese negotiating style and strategies.

[47] Ibid., 275.

[48] Ibid., 276.

[49] Karnow, 609-612.

[50] One source claims that Giap was forced to execute this sequential campaign against his wishes by North Vietnam's higher leadership. See Cecil Currey, *Victory at Any Cost* (Washington: Brassey's, 1997), 284.

air power campaign. The NVA suffered an estimated 100,000 casualties, lost 450 tanks, and was reduced to combat ineffectiveness for little gain.[51]

Following the failed offensive and the end of Linebacker I, the United States and North Vietnam reengaged in serious negotiations for a peace treaty. When the North Vietnamese backed out of negotiations in December 1972, Nixon ordered a second air campaign, Linebacker II. At the end of December, North Vietnam rejoined negotiations and the Paris Peace treaty was signed on January 27, 1973.

Robert McNamara summarized the outcome of the war for the United States:

> By the time the United States finally left South Vietnam in 1973, we had lost over 58,000 men and women; our economy had been damaged by years of heavy and improperly financed war spending; and the political unity of our society had been shattered, not to be restored for decades.[52]

Although the North Vietnamese had suffered an estimated 900,000 killed, they would resume the offensive in late 1974 and take all of Vietnam in 1975.[53] America's will to support its ally had been broken; Congress forbade any further involvement in Indochina. As Harry Summers saw it, "The sad truth was that the American people were sick and tired of Vietnam and just wanted it to go away."[54]

## B. HYPOTHESES APPLIED TO THE WAR

### 1. Skilled Army

The United States in 1965 had a skilled army. Political constraints, however, led the Johnson administration to take actions which undermined its effectiveness. These

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[51] Davidson, 705.

[52] Robert McNamara and Brian Van De Mark, *In Retrospect* (New York: Random House, 1995), 319.

[53] Estimate of NVA killed includes Viet Cong, from R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History*, 4th edition (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 1333.

[54] Summers, *Atlas*, 190.

actions included an unwillingness to call up experienced reserve forces, a reliance on the draft, and a one-year tour policy for soldiers in Vietnam. By the 1970s, these factors had gone uncorrected and, when combined along with national dissatisfaction, created serious problems in the armed forces. As William Colby noted, "the erosion of national will at home was being reflected in an erosion of discipline and morale among the remaining American troops in Vietnam."[55]

Even the most skilled U.S. forces committed in 1965 were hampered by personnel policies which reduced their effectiveness. One air cavalry battalion commander from the early years who later would rise to three stars described his situation:

> We were being shipped off to war sadly understrength, and crippled by the loss of almost a hundred troopers in my battalion alone. The very men who would be most useful in combat- those who had trained the longest in the new techniques of helicopter warfare- were by this order taken away from us. It made no sense then; it makes no sense now.[56]

These problems worsened as the war continued; the use of reluctant draftees and hastily trained junior officers put a "severe strain" on the military's "ability to carry out is combat missions."[57] One military historian found that "the American military was fighting well below its potential as a result of several factors."[58] This Army's own statistics confirm this picture. The desertion rate more than quadrupled from 1965 to 1972, there were at least 333 assaults with explosive devices against officers or sergeants in 1971, and at least 50% of the troops in Vietnam were using drugs of some sort in the same year.[59]

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[55] William Colby and James McCargar, *Lost Victory* (Chicago, Contemporary Books, 1989), 326.

[56] Moore and Galloway, 25.

[57] Stanton, 364.

[58] Ibid., 365.

[59] Statistics from Department of Defense as cited in Richard Gabriel and Paul Savage, *Crisis in Command* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978). The author was also helped by Mark Lwin, "Modern Day Mutinies," an unpublished paper and briefing at George Washington University, 23 April 1996.

The employment of U.S. forces was also hampered by the command structure in Vietnam. Unity of command was never achieved due to most significantly bureaucratic-organizational pressures and a "business as usual" approach to the war.[60] The United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) had control only over American forces in South Vietnam. MACV had no authority over allied forces, nor did it direct air operations outside the South.[61] This peculiar arrangement, which flew in the face of military wisdom about the unity of command, was a hindrance to the development of effective strategy.

While America paid more attention to technology than skill, the North Vietnamese Army realized the importance of superior fighting proficiency. General Giap recognized that, "not only must we have great determination to fight and win, but we must also know how to fight and win, that is, we must have a good fighting method to be able to defeat the enemy."[62] Accordingly, the North Vietnamese continued training their forces throughout the war. As one American source recounts, "even with a war going on all around them, the Viet Cong were still able to detach men from their units and send them to formal training courses."[63] Once trained to a high level, these men were in the war for the duration, not just one year.

The North Vietnamese adapted well to their material disadvantages. Giap himself realized the importance of such innovation by proclaiming "We must invent more methods of fighting the U.S. Air Force."[64] With high level emphasis on adapting to superior American air and ground power, Giap and his forces found many methods to reduce their vulnerabilities and even the balance. North Vietnamese forces used elaborate camouflage,

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[60] Davidson, 801-5.

[61] Summers, *Atlas*, 76.

[62] Vo Nguyen Giap, *"Big Victory, Great Task"* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 85.

[63] Lanning and Cragg, 63.

[64] Giap, *Big Victory*, 107.

close combat tactics, and landing zone watchers to protect themselves from American aircraft, artillery, and helicopters.[65] One American general who fought against the North Vietnamese later said,

> Considering the state of technical competence of the society from which they came, they fought very well against a technologically superior society. They rapidly adopted tactics and techniques designed to diminish the effectiveness of their opponent's weaponry.[66]

Because their strategy was one of cumulative psychological gains to undermine America's will, the North Vietnamese Army did not have to win major battles for its strategy to succeed. Instead, the NVA only had to survive and continue to inflict American casualties. The NVA had enough skill to accomplish these tasks; Ronald Spector summarized their abilities:

> Although the Communists' skill and tenacity in defense inspired awe and respect, their performance on the offensive was often weak and ineffective... A Defense Department study found that Communist-initiated attacks on U.S. positions, though they often achieved surprise, still cost the Communists an average of five soldiers for every U.S. casualty.[67]

While the skill differential between the North Vietnamese and Americans was never as great as it had been between the Finns and the Russians, it was sufficient to allow Giap to execute his strategy. They had the skill they needed to avoid their own destruction and continue killing Americans.

### 2. National Will

America's will to conduct the war began to fracture in the early days. Public protest first came to Robert McNamara's attention on November 2, 1965. A Quaker set himself on

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[65] For specific examples of North Vietnamese adaptation and innovation, see Currey, 251-59; Moore and Galloway, 230; John Plaster, *SOG* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1997), 41-2, 80, 103; and Scales, 131-36.

[66] Lieutenant General William J. McCaffrey, USA(ret.), as cited in Lanning and Cragg, 209.

[67] Spector, 156. An excellent comparison of American and NVA tactical skill is also found in Griffith, 136-162.

fire in front of McNamara's Pentagon office.[68] Despite this, McNamara reported that "from early 1966 through mid-1967, public support for the administration's Vietnam policy remained surprisingly strong, despite rising U.S. casualties and increasing media scrutiny of the war."[69] But later in 1967, he was advising the President that "the American public...does not give the appearance of having the will to persist."[70] Henry Kissinger in 1969 noted that the majority of public support was still behind the war, but perceived America as "a nation tearing at itself in the midst of a difficult war."[71] The persistent and rising cry of anti-war protesters did not end the war, but it troubled decision makers and constrained the war effort. As one commentator found:

> While [the antiwar movement] did not succeed in transforming the goals of U.S. foreign policy in general, or the specific purposes of U.S. intervention in Vietnam, the mobilization of popular sentiment against the war did manage to block and/or reduce the scale of military strategies that were necessary to achieve those objectives.[72]

This constraint on military operations was significant; the public's attitude prevented sustained offensive operations against critical targets in North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. As a result, the United States could not find a military strategy to win the war and an unspoken goal of victory was dropped in finding an honorable way to withdraw.

Unlike its neighbor to the South, the government of North Vietnam was characterized by "unity, tight control, and popularity."[73] North Vietnamese morale was built "on the theme of nationhood for all of Vietnam."[74] The North Vietnamese soldier(and

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[68] McNamara, 216.

[69] Ibid., 252.

[70] Quotation from a memo from McNamara to President Johnson in early November 1967. See McNamara, 308.

[71] Kissinger, 292-3.

[72] Paul Joseph, "Direct and Indirect Effects of the Movement against the Vietnam War, " in *The Vietnam War* (fn.13), 180. Schulzinger, 245, also has relevant comments on this issue.

[73] Schulzinger, 328.

[74] Lanning and Cragg, 198.

citizen) was given the simple message that "The war is going well, we are winning, but it will be a long time before final victory is achieved."[75] With this popular and credible theme, along with strict internal security measures, no dissent arose in North Vietnam. Even after the death of Ho Chi Minh, when the younger leaders were supposedly war-weary, there was no change in the goal of the war; the only debate was whether to risk all in a massive offensive that could quickly end the conflict, or continue to fight a more protracted war.[76]

### 3. External Support

The level of external support for North Vietnam far exceeded what Ethiopia and Finland had received during their asymmetric wars. Soviet and Chinese aid allowed North Vietnam to focus most of its manpower in the south, provided effective weapons and munitions with which to continue the struggle, and helped ease the effects of damage from American strikes. Perhaps most importantly, the specter of Chinese intervention served to limit American strategic options.

The Soviet Union and China provided economic and material assistance which was many orders of magnitude greater than what Ethiopia or Finland had received. When the U.S. inflicted an estimated $85 million in damage by air attacks in 1965, the Soviets and Chinese provided aid valued at $250 to 400 million.[77] Soviet aid alone, from 1966 onward, never averaged less than $400 million a year.[78] The Chinese made every effort to meet Hanoi's requests in a timely manner; "Often, when Hanoi's requests exceeded

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[75] Ibid., 173.

[76] On North Vietnamese war weariness, see Schulzinger, 274-5; on post-Ho strategy debates, see Currey, 283-4

[77] Schulzinger, 210.

[78] Based on data cited in Lanning and Cragg, 119.

China's production capability, Beijing transferred arms and equipment directly from the PLA to Hanoi's inventory."[79]

China also provided North Vietnam with around 320,000 troops from 1965 to 1969.[80] Although these soldiers did not engage in direct combat with Americans and were held in the North, they helped execute various engineering tasks, rebuild damaged transportation systems, man antiaircraft guns, and serve as a strategic reserve in the event of an American invasion of the North.[81] The Chinese manpower allowed the North Vietnamese to commit its combatants to the South; as Douglas Pike found, "eventually almost all [NVA] infantry divisions were outside of North Vietnam-in Laos, in Cambodia, or, overwhelmingly, in South Vietnam."[82]

Finally, the possibility of Chinese or Soviet intervention limited U.S. strategic options. In the early years of the war, an invasion of North Vietnam was ruled out because of fears it might provoke a Chinese intervention similar to the Korean War.[83] By the time the danger of Chinese or Soviet intervention subsided following border disputes between the two Communist powers in 1969 and moves towards détente and diplomatic relations between each country and the United States, American will would not support any action which would expand the war.

Soviet and Chinese aid did many things for North Vietnam. It provided a sophisticated defense system around the capital. It repaired infrastructure and replaced supplies lost to American air attacks. It allowed the North Vietnamese to shift their manpower from the defense of the North to the conquest of the South. And perhaps most

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[79] Xiaoming Zhang, "The Vietnam War, 1964-1969: A Chinese Perspective," *The Journal of Military History* 60, no.4 (October 1996), 737.

[80] Schulzinger, 210.

[81] Zhang, 750-759.

[82] Pike, 48.

[83] McNamara, 211. It now appears that such fears were justified, at least before 1969; see Zhang, 742, 746, 751.

importantly, it prevented the United States from attempting a possible war-winning strategy until America had lost the will to follow such a course of action.

### 4. Opponent's Counter Strategy

Did the United States realize the type of war it was fighting and take action to defeat the enemy strategy? The answer is clearly 'no' due to American misperceptions about the nature of the conflict and incorrect estimates of what could be achieved. The United States had to execute three major tasks in Vietnam: defeat the North Vietnamese, stabilize the South Vietnamese government, and end the insurgency. America achieved the last, partially succeeded on the second, but failed to accomplish the first. By 1971, the insurgent organization in South Vietnam had either perished in Tet or was destroyed by various pacification programs.[84] The South Vietnamese government was always shaky, but managed to hold elections in 1971 and field an army which continued fighting until the end. America, however, always misunderstood the type of conflict it was engaged in with North Vietnam.

As H.R. McMaster asserts, "Johnson and McNamara succeeded in creating the illusion that the decisions to attack North Vietnam were alternatives to war rather than war itself."[85] America's early strategy were based on two major assumptions: "first, that the principal difficulty in South Vietnam stemmed from North Vietnam's support for the Viet Cong; and second, that the gradual application of military and diplomatic pressures on the Hanoi government would persuade North Vietnam's leaders to terminate that support."[86] With a focus on achieving a negotiated settlement instead of winning a victory, American policy makers and military leaders attempted a variety of half measures which could not achieve decisive victory. The prospect or appearance of negotiations with the North

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[84] Colby, esp. 420-21. Colby's claims were verified by Karnow who interviewed former Viet Cong and NVA leaders. See Karnow, 602.

[85] McMaster, 326.

[86] Ibid., 139.

Vietnamese came to be regarded as success. But as Henry Kissinger saw from a letter to Ho Chi Minh to Nixon in 1969, this was only a clever diplomatic strategy by the North to support their military campaign:

> It once again made clear that Hanoi would be satisfied only with victory. It counted on the nervous exhaustion of the United States; it would tolerate no appearance of 'progress' in negotiations that might enable us to rally public opinion.[87]

The perception of Vietnam in the early years of the war as an exercise in political communication between two states rather than as war meant that the U.S. not only failed to implement an appropriate counter strategy, but also made it easier for the North Vietnamese to accomplish their strategy. The attempt to present the war as a low-cost effort to convince North Vietnam to desist in its actions and American claims of progress after every large battle or move towards negotiations meant that North Vietnam did not have to win any battle or campaign militarily; Hanoi only had to prove America's leaders wrong, destroy their credibility, and break the nation's will to continue the fight.

## C. CONCLUSION

North Vietnam adopted a fully asymmetric strategy in the war to end American involvement in Indochina from 1965 to 1973. The North Vietnamese were unable to match the technological systems which provided American forces with a superior level of firepower, mobility, and intelligence. Instead, General Giap and the North Vietnamese attacked America's national will by using a cumulative pattern of both small unit and large unit actions, none of which was meant to be critical in and of itself.

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[87] Kissinger, 283.

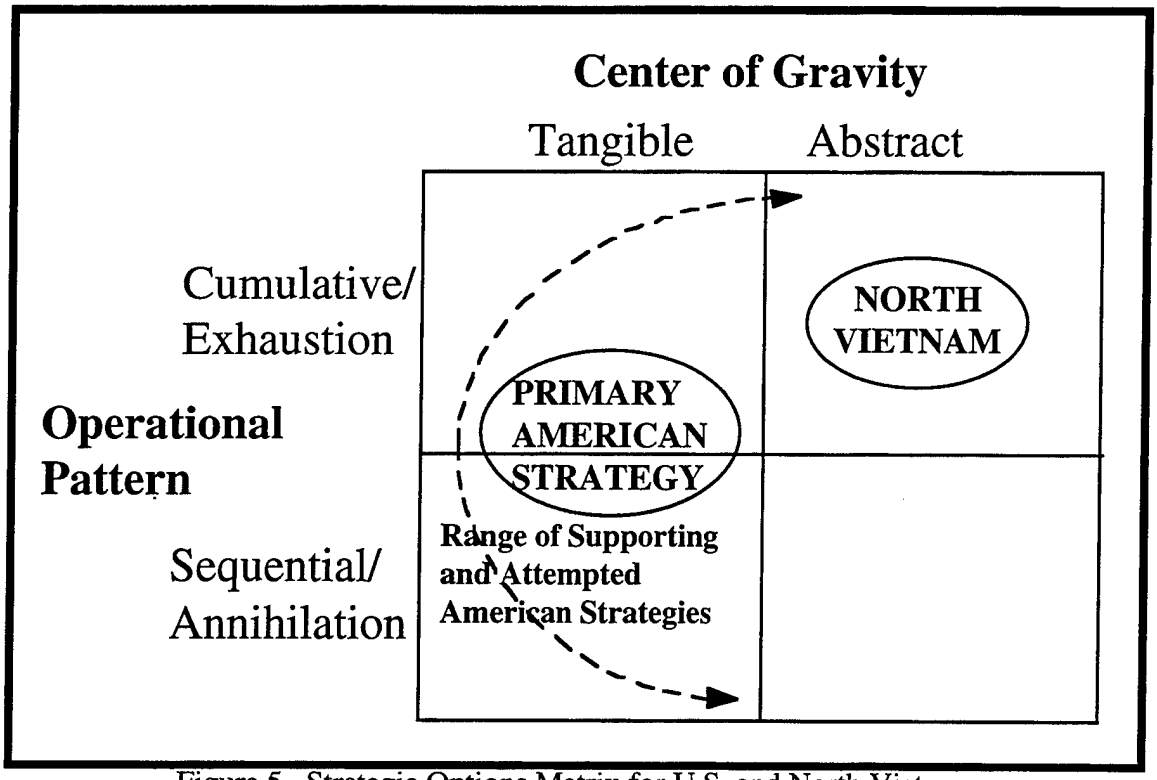


Figure 5. Strategic Options Matrix for U.S. and North Vietnam

Giap's strategy forced America to reconsider its military aims and strategy in the conflict. In 1973, the United States would pull its all its forces in South Vietnam, cease its combat support of their army, and rely solely on a strategy of material aid and limited advisory support. North Vietnam achieved its goal; the United States would not attempt to interfere with its later efforts to invade the South and unify the country.

The success of the North Vietnamese strategy is largely explained by the fact that the strength of all four of the contextual variables were in favor of their side. While North Vietnam did not achieve a skill differential of the magnitude that the Finns had against their opponents, it was enough to support their strategy. North Vietnamese national will demonstrated remarkable cohesion, even in the face of bombings and massive casualties; meanwhile America, absent any threat to its own land, was gripped by domestic turmoil. China and Russia provided massive quantities of men and material which, although they did not play a direct combat role, allowed North Vietnam to persist in the conflict and carry the fight into the South. Communist support also deterred American policymakers from

attempting an invasion of the North. Finally, America's strategy for dealing with the war was crippled by a number of assumptions which played into the hands of the North Vietnamese. During the war, Giap recognized importance of all four of these key variables:

> The victory of an armed struggle depends on many factors: the nature of the war, the comparison of forces in the two camps, the strength and quality of the armed forces, the fighting spirit of the armed forces and the people, economic and military potentials, strategic and tactical leadership, international assistance, and so forth.[88]

On the strength the those factors, he would achieve his victory.

[88] Giap, *"Big Victory"*, 85.

# VI. CONCLUSION

## A. SUMMARY

While America's technology will likely give it a decisive advantage against those who chose a symmetric strategy, the cases illustrate that strategic options exist for weak states despite their technological inferiority. As shown in Figure 6, the cases illustrate that there are a number of strategic options for weak states. As long as they avoid fighting great powers with strategies of the same quadrant, they may have a chance to win.

We must remember, however, that Admiral Wylie's model only offers us an analytic tool to help categorize and identify enemy strategies. It does not make value judgments as to their effectiveness. Unlike the claims of some, the author does not believe that any single strategy is decisive in all situations. But by looking at similar situations, we can identify conditions which make strategies effective under common circumstances. Through the case studies, we have examined what conditions are necessary for the success of asymmetric strategies by weak states.

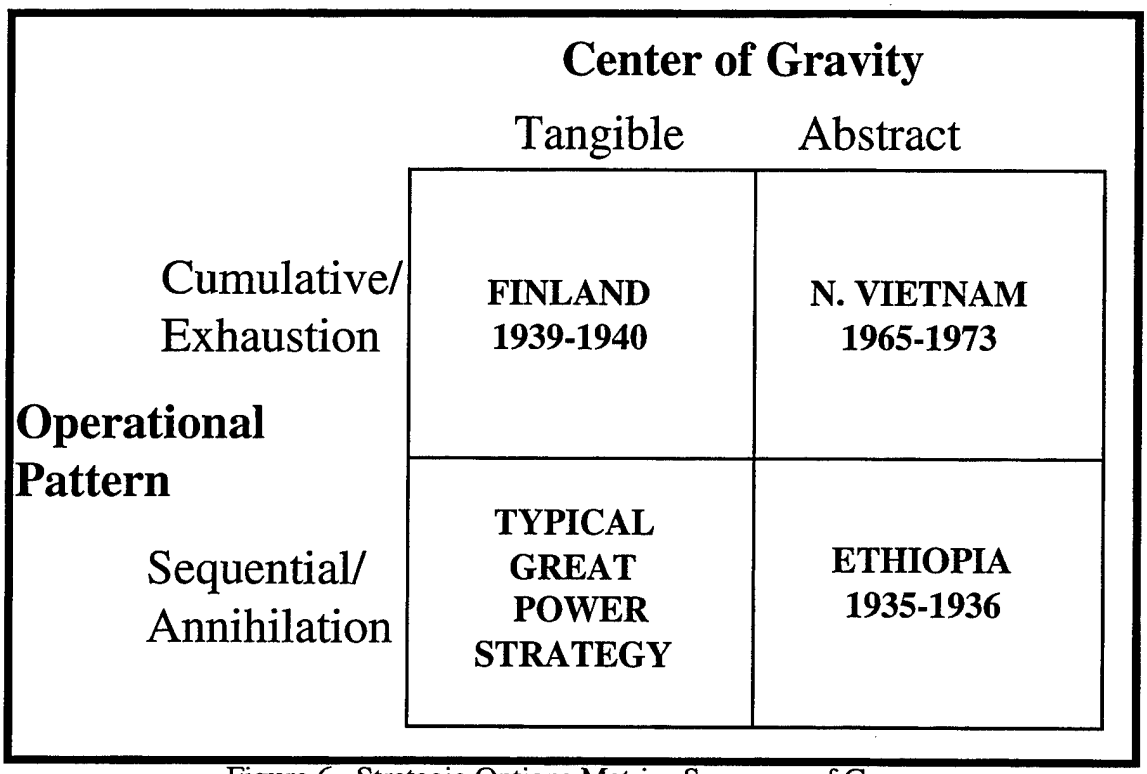


Figure 6. Strategic Options Matrix- Summary of Cases

The prospect of victory through strategic innovation by weak states appears to be dependent on a number of factors, all of which will rarely be in their favor and none of which is sufficient in itself. As Figure 7 shows, there is correlation between the skill differential, national will differential, level of external support, and opponent's counter strategy and the outcome of great power-weak state conflict. Additionally, as developed in the case studies, these factors more than correlate with outcome; they had direct causal effect. These factors are critical to the success or failure of a weak state's asymmetric strategy.

| | Italo-Ethiopian | Russo-Finnish | American- N. Vietnam |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Skilled Army** | Weak State was less skilled | Weak State had significantly more skill | Neutral or slightly in favor of weak state |
| **National Will** | Great Power had positive advantage | Equal- no dissent on either side | Weak Power had positive advantage |
| **External Support** | •Moral only | •Moral<br>•Some Material&Manpower<br>•Possible external intervention | •Significant Material& Manpower<br>•Credible Threat of external intervention |
| **Counter Strategy** | Italy took action to preempt possible Ethiopian responses | Russia underestimated Finland's abilities | U.S. misread enemy's and sponsor's aims and limited own effort |
| **Outcome** | No change to Great Power's war aims- Ethiopia occupied | Great Power's war aims reduced- Finland loses significant territory | Great Power's war aims changed- U.S. ends involvement in Vietnam |

Figure 7. Case Summary

## B. STRATEGY AND ASYMMETRIC STRATEGIES: RECENT EVIDENCE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Recently, asymmetric strategies have been the strategy of choice of states and pseudo-state actors born out of the absence or breakdown of states. Iraq attempted to use a sequential operational pattern to break America's will and the coalition's cohesion in the

1991 Gulf War.[1] In war of a smaller scale, Mohamed Farah Aideed went to war with America and the United Nations in 1993 and forced their withdrawal by using a cumulative strategy against the same center of gravity.[2] Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a largely autonomous Chechen state was created by the use of a cumulative strategy against the Russia's will. Finally, the Hezbollah, an externally supported non-state army, continues to wage a war of many small actions against the Israelis in southern Lebanon.

In the future, it is clear that nations hostile to the United States will continue to use asymmetric strategies. A recent North Korean defector claims that, in the event of war, his nation plans to fight a cumulative campaign to break America's will; the North Koreans expect to rapidly cause up to 20,000 American casualties using massed artillery and missiles, some with NBC warheads.[3] The question is whether these technologically weaker nations will have the critical factors for success on their side.

In terms of skilled armies, few if any nations will be able to match America's training resources. America's emphasis on defeating large armored invasions and using precision strikes, however, could mean that training resources may not go to the types of forces who will be the most likely to directly face asymmetric combatants. Furthermore, many of our opponents will come from "warrior" communities where fighting is a way of life.[4] Finally, the proliferation of WMD may be an effective substitute for the lack of a positive skill differential for a weak state; as a recent RAND report found, "any future adversary will most likely employ *asymmetric* strategies, prominent among which will be NBC weapons, especially chemical and biological ones."[5]

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[1] See Lawerence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, "How Kuwait Was Won: Strategy in the Gulf War," *International Security* 16, no.2 (Fall 1991):15.

[2] See Rick Atkinson, "Firefight in Mogadishu," *Washington Post*, 30-31 January 1994.

[3] North Korean Colonel Joo-hwai Choi, as cited in the *Washington Times*, 26 September 1997, 5.

[4] Ralph Peters, "Winning Against Warriors," *Strategic Review* 24, no.3 (Summer 1996): 12-21.

[5] Gregory F. Treverton and Bruce W. Bennett, *Integrating Counterproliferation into Defense Planning*, RAND Defense Issues Report (Santa Monica: RAND, 1997), 1.

National will is probably the one area considered by ourselves and our enemies to be our greatest weakness. As Thomas Mahnken notes, "Americans have historically shown an aversion to becoming involved in protracted, bloody conflicts, except where the survival of the United States and its values is at stake."[6] The evidence suggests that, in most cases, weak states may be able to count on a national will differential in their favor. A 1997 public opinion poll found majority support in the United States for military intervention only in the case of a direct attack on America.[7] This evidence, however, is highly speculative; actual responses in the event of a crisis are shaped by factors such as emotions and political leadership not considered by this poll.

Finally, it appears weak states may have a harder time in gaining high levels of external support in the future. A quick look at the cases covered here suggests that weak states in a multipolar system may be ignored by great powers concerned primarily with relations with their rivals, but that weak states in a bipolar system may be able to secure ample support. Under this logic, weak states would probably have a difficult time gaining external support in a unipolar system dominated by America. This is a topic for further research.

The prospects for the success of a weak state's asymmetric strategy based on the critical factors are uncertain in the future. Skill may be in their favor if America limits or misdirects its training resources or if WMD prove to be a viable option to balance the skill differential. National will appears to be in favor of America's opponents, but mass psychology is difficult to predict accurately in all situations. Finally, a quick look suggests that gaining external support may be more difficult now than in a world divided between

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[6] Thomas Mahnken, "America's Next War," *Washington Quarterly* 16, no.3 (Summer 1993): 174.

[7] 1997 Roper Starch Worldwide poll as cited in *Army Times*, 1 September 1997, 28. A military response to a direct attack on the U.S. had 84% support, while a response to attacks on Americans abroad had only 50% support, and intervention to protect economic interests had only 27% support.

East and West. The lesson for America is that while asymmetric strategies by weak states face uncertain prospects, so does our own military dominance based on this calculus.

The final critical factor is our own counter strategy. Crafting an effective strategy to deal with hostile weak states requires two key actions: first, recognizing an asymmetric strategy; and, second, taking action to disrupt it and deprive the enemy of any advantage from the critical factors. Our effectiveness in developing such a strategy appears to be hindered by both our perceptions and our organization.

In terms of perceptions, what we regard as a simple police action or a multilateral conflict-resolution effort, such as bringing a war criminal to justice, may be regarded as an act of war by the other side. Aideed saw our actions in this light; Radovan Karadzic might feel the same in the Bosnian Serb statelet. Our development of an effective counter strategy is hindered by asymmetric perceptions: their perception of war and our perception that it is something else. We need to see these conflicts for what they really are, and be prepared to take the necessary military actions to see them through. As one Army officer has observed, we need a "Revolution in Military Ethics."[8]

Hand-in-hand with the correct perception of asymmetric strategies, we need an organizational structure that can develop and integrate all the necessary components into a military strategy. Italy in the first case and North Vietnam in the last were able to integrate military and non-military actions. But in America, as John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt have recently observed, "the military and diplomatic communities have yet to master real-time, close-in cooperation...and there is a growing need for such cooperation."[9] To achieve this end, these two strategists see a need for a revolution in diplomatic affairs to accompany the revolution in military affairs.

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[8] Ralph Peters, "A Revolution in Military Ethics?", *Parameters* 26, no.2 (Summer 1996): 102-8.

[9] John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "Looking Ahead: Preparing for Information-Age Conflict," in *In Athena's Camp* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1997), 489-90.

A final application of this perspective on asymmetric strategy concerns America's potential role as a supporter of weak states faced by larger powers with advanced technology. U.S. direct intervention in their defense may not be always possible, whether it is because we view them as a peripheral concern, we have no formalized commitments to back them, or we have turned to an "off-shore balancing" grand strategy. The lessons of this thesis suggest that American support, combined with an asymmetric strategy by the weak state, may be enough to bring them victory. American Special Forces or private contractors could reinforce the weaker nation's skills. America could help in the development of psychological and information campaigns to strengthen the national will and weaken the enemy's. Finally, America could provide material support or even threaten intervention under certain conditions (e.g. the enemy's use of WMD). Perhaps the biggest problem with this approach to support weaker states are the uncertainties associated with maintaining their own national will in the face of significant existing divisions; supporting a divided state like Ukraine (with a Russian and a native population) make be significantly more difficult than helping Taiwan, where, despite ethnic divisions, the populace is generally united in its attitude towards China.

In conclusion, military strategy in war is properly viewed as a broad topic. The simple combination of a center of gravity and an operational pattern hold a vast number of possibilities for actual implementation. Furthermore, each one of the critical factors in a great power-weak state conflict involves a number of related topics. Maintaining a skilled army involves matters of force structure, training, innovation and morale. The need to sustain national will encompasses domestic politics and civil-military relations. Prospects for external support rely on foreign relations and the structure of the international system. The nature of strategy implies a need to escape a single variable approach to military problems (i.e. air power or precision strikes can solve it all). As Lieutenant General Paul K. Van Riper, USMC (ret.), recently wrote, "If as Colin Gray says, 'strategy relates to everything else,' then it is not possible to talk only of strategy in its largest sense. We must

think in a larger, more coherent manner."[10] Strategists at the highest levels must be more than technical experts or advocates of one-dimensional solutions; as one scholar has written, "almost by definition, strategic thinkers are broadly educated, not narrowly trained."[11]

[10] Lt Gen Paul Van Riper, "Strategy and the Formulation of National Security Policy," presented at the National Defense University, October 1997.

[11] Gregory Foster, "Research, Writing, and the Mind of the Strategist," *Joint Force Quarterly* no.11 (Spring 1996), 111.

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